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THE SACRED PLAINS.



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THE
SACRED PLAINS.

BY J. H. HEADLEY.

Blest land of Judæa, thrice hallowed in song,
Where the holiest of memories pilgrim-like throng;
With the glide of a spirit I traverse the sod,
Made bright by the steps of the angels of God.

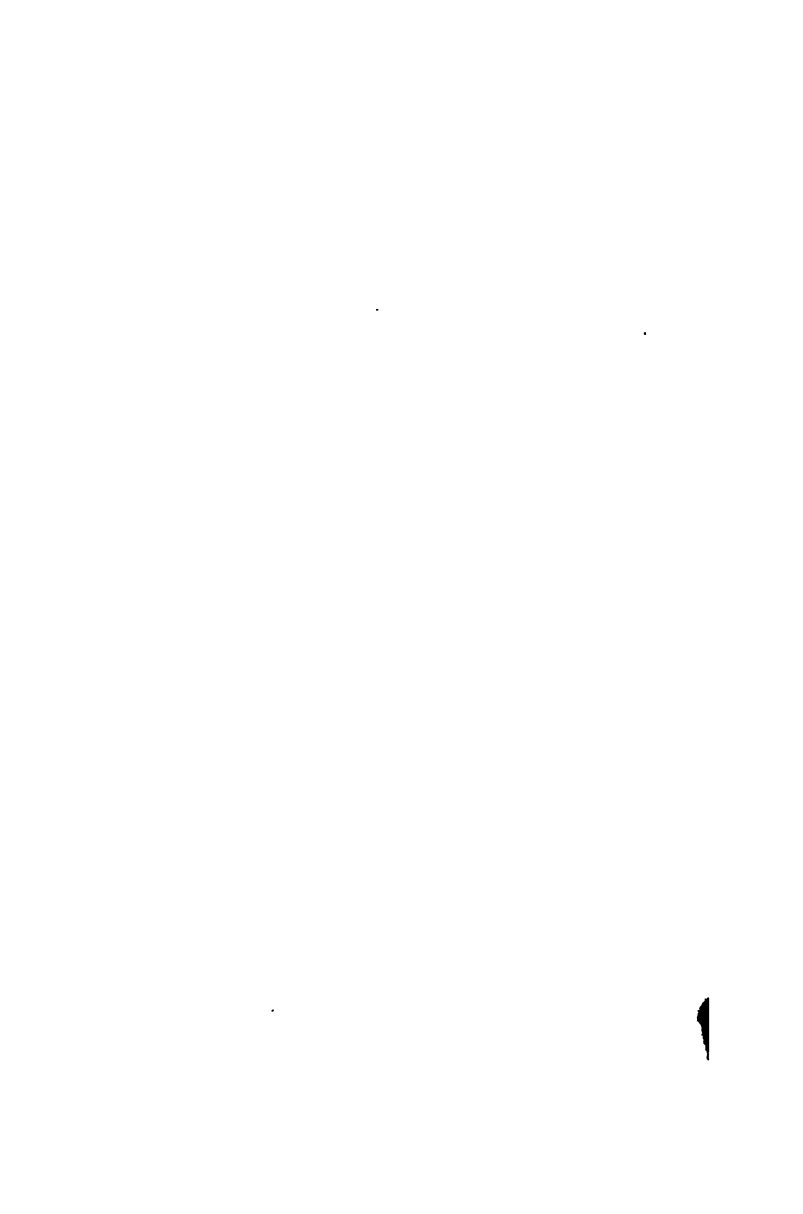
WHITTIER.

LONDON :
JAMES BLACKWOOD, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1857.

203. A. 330.

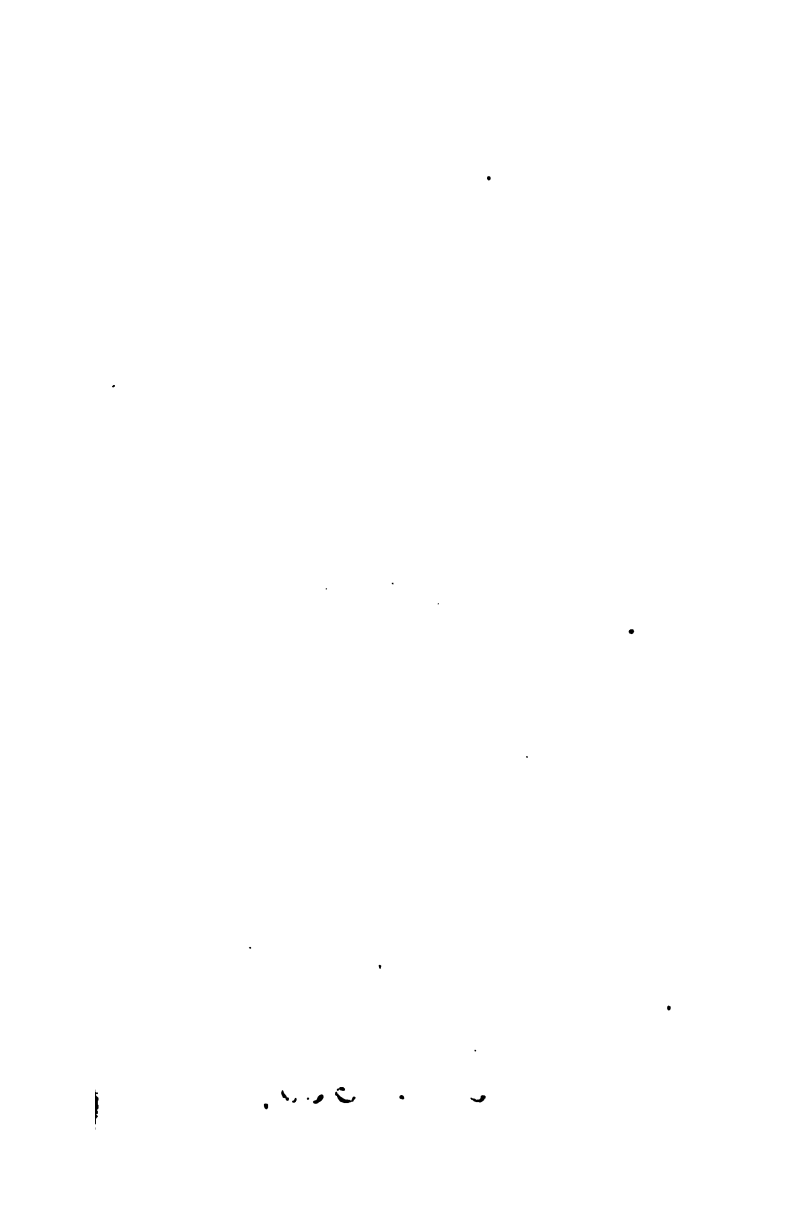


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PREFACE.

THE design of the following work, like that of its precursor,* is to render more familiar and lifelike some of the scenes commemorated in the Bible. To those who have perused that work, I need make no apology for attempting to collect together, in one continuous series of groups, some of those sublime and thrilling events connected with certain generic localities, as a painter would throw all his marine views into one series, and his landscapes into another. That the subject was exhausted, no one can pretend

* The Sacred Mountains.


to affirm. The Bible, like the great fountain of boundless love it commemorates, is inexhaustible, and every attempt to arrange its scenes, define its localities, and elucidate its truths, is not only commendable in itself, but of paramount importance to the Bible student whose mind wishes to obtain clear and distinct ideas of certain localities and the events connected with them. Hence I have thought the Sacred Plains worthy of a separate niche in the Christian mind. If they do not tower aloft with that sublime and awful majesty with which the mountains are invested, they are nevertheless connected with some of the most interesting and stirring events recorded in the Bible; and to elucidate them clearly and distinctly has been one of my chief objects.

The great Plain of Esdraclon, though not

mentioned in the Bible (except in the Apocrypha), is nevertheless so intimately connected with the history of Palestine that I could not well omit it. The Plains, also, of Dura and Shinar, though situated in the province of Babylon, being the scene of great public miracles, I have also included, and hope the reader will find both chapters interesting.

I have, throughout the work, endeavoured to connect one leading incident with each locality, which I have amplified. Other minor incidents I have treated somewhat briefly, or made them subservient to the leading picture. The Bible and a map of Palestine have been my only text-books. The reflections and deductions are such as the nature of the case and our common humanity would naturally suggest. In all

cases, where I have gone beyond the meagre outlines of the sacred record, and described scenes and convulsions of nature connected therewith, I have done so on the unimpeached testimony of modern travellers. Thus, in the description of the Plain of Jordan, and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, I have the authority of Lieutenant Lynch, who found the Dead Sea, by actual measurement, to be 1310 feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea; and also the Pillar of Salt remaining on its banks.



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THE SACRED PLAINS.



CHAPTER I.

THE PLAIN OF SHINAR.

THE first plain of which we have any account in the sacred record was one in the land of Shinar. In the plain but emphatic language of Scripture, "As the generations of earth journeyed from the East, they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there."

This plain is supposed to be a part of that tract of level country lying between the River Euphrates on the north and east, and the Desert of Arabia on the south and west. But of the extent, fertility, and general appearance of that portion known as the Plain of Shinar, we have no record by the sacred historians. From

preme Ruler to accomplish his divine purpose. He had but to speak, and a great and strong wind, like that which rent the mountains and brake the rocks in pieces before the Lord, would have smitten the four corners at once, as it did the house where Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking together. One thunderbolt would have smitten it to the ground, or rent it like the vail of the temple, from the top to the bottom, when the Son of God was crucified. An earthquake, like that when the sixth seal was opened, might have shaken it down at once, and left not one brick upon another ; or the earth opened her mouth and swallowed it up, as it did Korah and his company ; or the fire of the Lord have fallen and licked up the edifice, as it did the bullock, wood, dust, and water, when Elijah contended with the priests of Baal. But such was not the will of Jehovah : which was, to break up the unity of their design, cause them to abandon their work, and scatter them abroad over the face of the whole earth. To this end he determined to confound their language, that they might not understand each other's speech. *It was done.* They left off to build the tower,

and scattered themselves abroad over the face of the whole earth.

Methinks the scene is now before me. A bright summer day has closed; the weary labourers have retired to rest. The camels and other beasts of burden, employed through the livelong day to gather the materials together, have been unloosed from their harness and driven to the distant pastures. One by one the lights have disappeared, and the mingled hum of unnumbered voices has gradually died away, and the soothing influence of balmy sleep presses down the eyelids of the tired multitude. The horned moon, sinking amidst a pile of clouds, gilds with a fitful radiance the dark outlines of that mighty edifice whose top seems to reach the stars, and whose huge shadow buries all the eastern camp in deepest shade.

The hour of midnight approaches, and the few sentinels appointed to keep watch over the slumbering camp, feel the drowsy influence of the hour.

The angel of the Lord descends: not to extract a rib from each unconscious slumberer, and reduplicate the host, as he did when a deep sleep fell upon Adam: not to slay the first-born, as he

did in Egypt: or to sweep to death the thousands of Assyria's king; but he came down to change the language of the unconscious sleepers, and thus break up the unity of their audacious design.

The hours roll on. The slumbering host dream not of the important change that has passed over them. Here and there an awakened sleeper, disturbed by some frightful dream, arouses his comrades, and endeavours to make them comprehend the cause of his unwonted disquietude. Those they awaken, thinking them still dreaming, or suddenly deranged, endeavour to soothe them again to sleep, confident that the dawning morn will make every thing right.

By degrees the dark sky waxes grey. The stars, as though weary with watching, twinkle drowsily, and the first blush of morn steals over the face of the quiet earth.

One by one the sleepers awake. The customary morning salutations attempted to be exchanged are unintelligible to each other. As the morn advances, and others awake to join them, the jargon becomes still greater. Finally, the whole camp is astir, but what confusion is there! Babel *is indeed speaking* with all its voices, since all are

talking together : mothers, unable to understand the language of their children ; husbands and wives, unintelligible to each other ; the friends and companions of yesterday, now worse than strangers.

Let such an event happen in any of the populous cities of the present day, and imagination can hardly conceive the confusion and dismay such a change would occasion.

It is not to be supposed that, in this sudden disruption of language, each individual had a separate dialect of his own. Such a minute division was unnecessary to accomplish God's purpose ; since a hundred different dialects would as effectually break up the unity of design as a hundred thousand. We can imagine the different individuals selecting each other out in that vast multitude, and gathering into different groups as they find themselves able to understand each other. Leaving the unfinished city and tower, they scatter through the earth, peopling all climes and countries with their descendants.

The gradual decay of that mighty structure is an instructive theme for reflection. The first *century it probably suffered little : its sharp angles*

and spacious courts preserving their original outlines. As ages stole on, and days, weeks, months, years, and rolling centuries, pressed with leaden foot upon it, the walls gradually sunk, and crumbled away. The ivy, creeping over it, folded its green mantle around the shattered walls, and held its broken fragments together in one long, last embrace. Moss gathered in its courts; and the foxglove and the lichen bloomed in every window. The bat built its nest undisturbed; the lizard crawled along its walls, and basked in the warm sunshine; the owlets nestled there, and nightly hooted from its storm-worn turrets, during the first stages of its decay. At last they all forsook it; the ivy withered; and down, down sunk the mighty fabric level with the plain, until its very site has become a controversy.

So, too, with its history. The first generation remembered it distinctly; the second had clear and well-defined ideas both of its form and extent, from the oft-told tales and animated descriptions of their parents; the third, fourth, and fifth generations, it had passed into tradition; and, like rays reflected back from mirror

to mirror, it gradually paled away as generations passed on, the night of forgetfulness silently stealing over it. Its very *name* had perished for ever, had not the pure and holy lights of revelation, shining through the dim vista of the lengthening past, preserved its history for our instruction and edification.


The world has rolled onward. Empires have risen and fallen. Nations have flourished and decayed. Languages have followed their mutations, like the blue shadows of a mountain stretching over an undulating sea. Some have perished for ever; others changed; new ones sprung into existence by old ones blending together like the prismatic colours of the rainbow. Our own language is comparatively but of yesterday, rich though it is with the spoils of a thousand others. Even that, like all sublunary things, is continually changing. The English of Chaucer and the English of Irving, are as unlike as the living Romaic and the dead Greek; yet, change as they may, we trace back their first germs to the building of the Tower of Babel, when so stupendous a design was *frustrated by the simplest means*; and, looking for-

ward to the future, we feel that it will be ever thus ; that mankind will never again all speak the same language, till that halcyon time,

“ When earth keeps Jubilee a thousand years.”

Then, indeed, shall *“ Zion be the city of our solemnities, and Jerusalem a quiet habitation. The ransomed of the Lord shall return with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. And then will he turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord with one consent ; and they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*

How sublime is the science of Astronomy ! Its flights how far, its calculations how accurate ! As twilight waves her magic wand over earth and sky, and, one by one, the starry band come forth to stud night's sable diadem, who has not felt the swelling influences of the hour ? Great thoughts of time and of space, and of that unseen and untried world beyond the stars, come rolling in dim and solitary grandeur over the soul. Who, in the silence of night, when the heavens are blazing with stars, and thoughts of earth *have faded away*, has not felt to exclaim with



the holy Psalmist, "*When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honour.*"

But it is not in the swelling emotions of the human heart, or in lofty flights of fancy, that the great truths of the Christian religion are elucidated and demonstrated. The humble disciple reads the Scripture account of the deluge, and he believes the record to be true because he has an answering record in his own bosom—the seal of faith—and he asks no other evidence. The geologist, however, *knows* it to be true, because he reads it in the great volume of nature, and the rocky pages open before him—the sea-shells on the mountain-tops; the stones rounded by the surgings of water; the coal-fields, once waving forest-trees. No! man may *lie*, but nature cannot.

The astronomer, too, who measures time and space—who, taking the earth for his scale, throws his line into boundless space, and calculates

eclipses, transits, and conjunctions a thousand years backward or forward with unerring accuracy—he hesitates not to believe his own record if he is sure that his calculations are correct; and he dare not dispute the records of the Bible if they agree with and confirm his calculations.

It is spring. On the Plain of Shinar a group of wise men or Magi are gathered together. There are shepherds, astrologists, stargazers, and astronomers among them. With surprise and admiration their eyes are fixed upon a star of more than ordinary splendour, which, flashing up the eastern sky, rivals the moon in brightness. It is no comet, for there is no tail stretching away from it. It is no meteor, for its light is calm and serene. As they gaze earnestly, it seems to expand until its rays assume the form of a crown. Then, indeed, do the wise men kneel down, and thank God for the glorious sign. “The King is born in Judea; the Messiah has come at last,” exclaim they, one to another; “Let us hasten to worship him.” Over all the eastern world the tradition had gone forth that a great Prince or Messiah would appear among *the Jews*, whose advent would be ushered in by

a star. The Israelites, during their captivity in Babylon, had frequently spoken of it. The sacred records they had left behind had positively declared it. "*There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel.*" Now the bright and glowing star, shining in the eastern sky, clearly indicated to these learned Magi that the time had come; for the star appeared in the constellation Pisces, the astronomical symbol of Judea; so they hastened to Jerusalem, and inquired of Herod, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him." There was no doubt, no hesitation. They had brought him presents of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. While they yet inquired for him, lo, the star came and stood over where the young child was. Then did these wise men fall down and worship him, and present the gifts unto him; and, being warned of God in a dream, returned not to Herod, but departed to their own country another way.

When God created the world, and laid the foundations thereof, "*the morning stars sang together.*" When the blessed Messiah was born

they did the same—science having clearly demonstrated that the star in the east was in reality a bright conjunction of the three planets, Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars.*

Glorious conjunction, worthy the illustrious advent! No transient meteor, bursting suddenly out of darkness, threw its fitful radiance on the Saviour's birthplace. No wandering star, shooting from its orbit, gilded with its waning light the Saviour's brow. No cloud by day or fire by night guided the footsteps of the wise men to the new-born God. Such earth-born symbols were

* Kepler, the prince of astronomers, by calculation, found that Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars were in conjunction in the constellation Pisces (the astronomical symbol of Judea) on the 20th day of May, in the year of Rome 748. They stood before sunrise in the eastern part of the heavens, in the twentieth degree of the constellation Pisces, where they were seen by the Magi, and told them that the promised time had come for the appearance of the Saviour in Judea, (Fish-land.) When they reached Jerusalem, the planets were again in conjunction, viz., on the 27th day of October, in the sixteenth degree. Then, in the evening, they stood in the southern part of the sky, pointing with their united rays to Bethlehem. The Magi followed the finger of heavenly light, and were brought to Christ. This astronomical truth ought long ago to have been made familiar to the popular mind.


for earth-born mortals. But three bright worlds—three morning stars—joined their glorious effulgence together to herald the advent of Him who brought "*Peace on earth and good-will to men.*"

Hallowed by the footsteps of Jehovah—the scene of the first miracle—the Plain of Shinar stands pre-eminent as the first *sacred* plain of earth.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLAINS OF JORDAN.

THE Plains of Jordan lie on both sides of the River Jordan, and extended, in ancient times, from the Sea of Tiberias to the southern part of the Dead Sea. In extent and fertility, they rivalled the great Plain of Esdrelon, of which that part lying between Mounts Tabor, Little Hermon; and Gilboa, and the River Jordan, was formerly included in the Plains of Jordan. They are first mentioned in the Bible as the chosen residence of Lot, when his herdsmen quarrelled with the herdsmen of his brother Abraham. After the brethren had returned from the land of Egypt, whither they had fled to avoid the famine which then pervaded the land of Canaan, their flocks and herds had increased to so *prodigious* an extent that the land was unable to



bear them together. Hence Abraham wisely proposed to his nephew, Lot, that they should separate for their mutual benefit.

Observe the kind and brotherly condescension with which he offers the choice of the whole land to Lot. "*Behold*," said he, "*all the land is before thee; if thou wilt take the left hand, I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right, then I will take the left.*" What a bright example of fraternal love and condescension for all coming time! Indeed, it has often seemed to me that the royal Psalmist had the case of Abraham and Lot in a particular manner before him when he exclaimed, "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*" And then the beautiful and expressive similes to which he compares it: "*It is like precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended on the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*" Far to the north, Mount Hermon soars aloft, its icy brow gathering and condensing the vapours of night, which distil their

dews on the flowery vales at its feet. So, too, with the mountains of Zion; they condense the ascending vapours, and change them into descending dews. Hence the exceeding beauty and aptness of the comparison; for the love and unity of the two heads descended down like the precious ointment and falling dews, not only to their principal herdsmen, but even to the lowest members of their households—the skirts of their garments.

At once Lot accepted this brotherly proposition, and, lifting up his eyes, beheld all the Plains of Jordan, that they were well-watered every where, even as the garden of the Lord, within whose borders four rivers had their sources, and were therefore admirably adapted to the pasturage of flocks and herds; and not wishing to settle so near his kinsman as to make another division soon necessary, he took the southern portion of the plains down toward the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Scarcely had Lot been settled in his new position when he innocently became involved in the domestic troubles of his neighbours. The kings of Shinar, Elasser, Elam, and Tidal, king of na-

tions, combine against the cities of the plain, and overthrow their five kings utterly, in the vale of Siddim. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah have fallen, and the scattered remnants of their armies have fled to the mountains. The spoilers take all the goods and provisions of the deserted cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, with Lot, and all that pertains to him, as prisoners, and depart. Well, indeed, might righteous Lot despair. His neighbours, wicked though they were, scattered or slain ; himself a captive, with all his household and treasures, to a proud and exultant foe. Henceforth, the most humiliating prospect was before him : perhaps, like one of the thirty-two kings captured by Adonezek, with his thumbs and great toes cut off, to gather crumbs under his master's table. Oh that he had but remained by himself, away from those wicked companions ; he had not then been involved with them in one common destruction ! He could not hope for ransom, for all his treasures were captured. He could not think of escape, for all his kindred would be left behind. There was surely no hope of deliverance, save by the power of Jehovah.

How wearily, to the marching captives, would

the days drag along ! As one after another slowly passed away, the bands of servitude seemed to tighten, and grow heavier and heavier. Link by link they could trace back the galling chain, the last link riveted on home. Oh ! the thoughts of home, when we are leaving it for ever ! How bright and cheerful seem its waning lights—how doubly dark the dreary path before us ! It is only the wanderer who can fully appreciate the sweets of home.

In the silence and darkness of night, Lot retires to a solitary place, and there pours out the anguish of his soul in the bosom of his God. At first, doubts, fears, and anguish overwhelmed him ; but, as he pressed closer and closer to the throne of mercy, faith rose triumphant, and they all passed away like a cold dark mist before the face of a rich and a glowing day. On a sudden, he hears a shout. It is only some reveller, brawling more loudly than his wassailing companions. But the sound increases ; other voices join it ; the blessed words of the Hebrew language break upon his ear. The revellers around him are disturbed likewise. The camp is attacked from every quarter. A host is approaching from the

mountains. Those flashing lights, coming up the valley, proclaim another army advancing from that direction ; while the sound of another host, from the southward, clearly convinces them the cities of the plain have hired the Egyptians against them. They are nearly surrounded ; and in a twinkling that mighty army is astir, each one endeavouring to save himself by flight. All encumbrances are hastily flung away, and they tread each other down in their eagerness to escape. But the avenger is behind them. Some escape ; but many are slain ; nor does the pursuit relax till they reach Hobnah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.

As the morning light slowly increases, Abram returns to the deserted camp ; his three hundred and eighteen servants are all there ; not one of them has fallen. He finds his brother Lot, unlooses his gyves, and clasps him in a fraternal embrace. Lot, overcome with emotion, leans on the breast of his brother, and kisses him again and again.

By degrees the spoils of the deserted camp are gathered together, and the party set out on their *return to Sodom*, laden with spoil. As they ap-

proach Shaveh, the king's dale, they are met by the new king of Sodom, with Melchisedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who brought bread and wine to refresh the wearied band. Then Melchisedek blesses Abram, and he in return gives him tithes of all. The new king of Sodom, in the plenitude of his gratitude, wishes him to retain the goods to himself; but he refuses, on his own account, to accept the most trifling thing, even to a thread or shoe-latchet, lest the donor should say he had made Abram rich.

Things now resumed their ordinary course. The fugitives returned home, and once more pursued their customary avocations. Their wickedness also increased, notwithstanding the remonstrance of Lot, whose righteous soul was daily vexed with their wicked and filthy conversation. His two daughters were betrothed to men in Sodom, and the ties of consanguinity were so strong that he continued to remain with them. Like a dim, sepulchral lamp burning amidst the mouldering slime and choking damps of a charnel-house, so he continued, from day to day, and year to year, by precept and example,

to endeavour to reform them ; but in vain. Their wickedness steadily increased, until the cry thereof went up to heaven.

Thirteen years had passed away, and the measure of their wickedness was full. The arm of Jehovah was bared. His vials of wrath were ready to be poured forth upon the offenders. Three angels are sent to warn Lot to flee from the impending destruction. On their way they call upon Abram, who dwelt in the plains of Mamre, who sat in the door of his tent in the heat of the day, and at his solicitation they tarry to partake of his proffered hospitality. One of them remains to communicate unto Abram the important mission on which they are sent ; while the others go on toward Sodom.

At evening they arrive there, and salute Lot, who sat in the gate of the city. He, seeing them approach, rises up to meet them, and bows down himself with his face toward the ground. At first they refuse his proffered hospitality ; but when he presses them greatly, they enter with him into his house and partake of the feast he prepares for them. The neighbours of Lot, finding *some strangers* come to visit him, determine

to make them partakers of their wickedness, and compass the house round from every quarter. They demand that the travellers be brought out to them. But Lot endeavours to persuade them to relinquish their unhallowed desires, and, as an inducement, offers his two virgin daughters a prey to the spoiler in their stead. Nothing, however, will satisfy them. They press upon Lot, and come near to break in the door. Then do the angels put forth their hands and draw Lot into the house, and smite the wretches besieging the door with blindness, so that they weary themselves in their vain attempts to find an entrance.

The angels now reveal unto Lot the purpose of their visit. God had sent them to destroy Sodom, and he is instructed to give the warning to all his relatives. Through the whole of that livelong night, the last awful pause before the day of doom, did that venerable man go from street to street and from house to house of his relatives, and with tears, prayers and entreaties, beg them to flee with him from the accursed city. But vain are all his entreaties—vain his prayers—vainer yet his tears. As he waxes

more and more earnest in his endeavours to persuade them to flee with him, they fancy the old man is demented. He seems to them as one that mocks. How foolishly the old man talks about the approaching destruction! How will the city be destroyed? Did not the sun go down calm and serene? There are no signs of an approaching storm. The stars are out in beauty, and the night dews are gently falling; what madness to think that nature is breathing her last! How much better if the old man would go home and go to sleep. But no; he still urges them with greater vehemence, and it is with the utmost difficulty they manage to escape his pressing importunities.

Morn at last breaks over the city. The angels are impatient. Destruction is on the wing. Hasten! Lot, hasten! But he yet lingers. How can he leave bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh to certain destruction? Frantic with agony, he scarcely knows what he is about. One of the angels seizes him by one hand, and his wife by the other, while the other angel takes his two daughters by the hand, and unfolding their wings, half walking and

half flying, with hurried steps they drag them out of the city.

Once out of it, the angels loose their hands, and bid them escape to the mountains—not even pausing for a moment to look back upon all they have left behind. Lot, however, entreats to be permitted to turn aside to a little city called Zoar, and his request is at last condescendingly granted. The sun rises upon the earth as they enter into Zoar. But Lot is doomed to another severe domestic bereavement. The partner of his bosom, in a moment of doubt or forgetfulness, disobeys the command by turning and looking back upon the doomed city. Instantly her feet are rooted to the earth—every trace of humanity disappears, and a huge column of salt rises up around her.

Centuries have rolled on centuries—two hundred generations have passed away—yet there, on the banks of the Dead Sea, that mighty column still towers aloft, a silent watcher keeping its solitary vigils over the buried cities of the plain.

The storm now bursts forth. The rainbow had pledged God's promise to man that he would *no more* destroy the world by water. Mingled

fire and brimstone are now the dread heralds of his wrath. We can imagine the consternation of the guilty wretches as the first drops of that burning shower began to descend upon them. Gladly, now, would the sons-in-law of Lot have fled. But their day of probation was past. Dark clouds roll down from the tops of the surrounding mountains and overspread the city. From their inky bosom the lightnings leap forth, and cross and recross each other in the horrid gloom. The thunder bellows in one loud, continuous roar—peal on peal. Faster and faster falls that burning shower. The works of man are blazing in every direction, and the inhabitants, scorched—burnt—smothered—and shrieking with agony, in vain implore for mercy. Hell is unloosed. The prince of darkness himself marches against them under the banner of his own element. At last a mighty earthquake shakes the ground. The earth opens beneath them, and down, down a thousand fathoms, sinks the accursed city, with its accumulated load of guilt and sin. One long, smothered cry of anguish bursts up from that yawning gulf, and then all is still—the cities of the *plain* have perished for ever.

The Plains of Jordan are no more. The permes have been divided, and are now known under other names. The lower ones have vanished for ever. The thick fetid waters of the Dead Sea run over them with all their burthenings. The River Jordan, discharging vapours into the yawning chasm, gradually fills it up, and thus formed the Dead Sea. It continued slowly rising, until the daily evaporation equalled the volume of water brought down the Jordan, which yet pours its sweet waters into its accursed bosom. No living creature inhabit its banks: no fish people its waters. The burning sun by day pours its vertical rays upon it, and, like a seething caldron, a dense cloud vapour curls upward. By night the surface is a wide sheet of phosphorescent flame: the waves as they break upon the shore, throw a sepulchral light upon the dead bushes and scattered fragments of rock. On each side, the jutting cliffs beetles upward to the height of sixteen hundred feet: their dark shadows stretching, at morning and evening, quite across the sea. Along the shore the Arnabs creep, and gather the lumps of bitumen, from time to time cast up by the pe-

derous waves. This they use in embalming their dead: it being black, brittle, and combustible, and yielding, when burnt, a strong, penetrating smell. The whole scene is dark, gloomy, and mysterious; and speaks, in silent yet unmistakable language, God's hatred of sin, and awful punishment of national transgression. It also speaks of his provident care in preserving the righteous, and leading them away from danger when the hour of vengeance has come.

Hallowed by the footsteps of the angels of God—the scene of his wrath—the Plains of Jordan stand pre-eminent in the history of the past as *sacred*, not only to God's provident care, but also his unsparing vengeance.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLAIN OF MAMRE.

ABRAM and Lot having separated, and Lot chosen the Plains of Jordan as his future residence, Abram removed his tent and pitched it in the Plains of Mamre, so called from Mamre, the Amorite, brother of Eschol and Aner, who, it appears, were confederates of Abram. These plains lie about seven leagues south of Jerusalem, between the two parallel ridges of hills known as the Mountains of Judah. The land was of extraordinary fertility, particularly in the production of grapes. It was here the spies sent by Joshua to view the land of Canaan gathered the grapes of Eschol, with pomegranates and figs, as a specimen of the exceeding goodness of the land which they were invited to go up and possess; and it was here they saw the sons of Anak,

the giant, in whose eyes they were accounted but as grasshoppers. It was here the patriarchs lived; here they communed with God and received the promises; here they died, and were buried. In all Palestine, nay, in all the world, there is no locality whose history and identity we can so clearly trace back through the dark labyrinth of the past as the Plains of Mamre, and the sacred events connected with them. Forty centuries have rolled their waves over them in vain.

Abram having pitched his tent in the Plains of Mamre, built an altar unto the Lord, on which he offered the morning and evening sacrifice. One day, a messenger who had escaped from the battle brought him tidings of the overthrow of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, with all their confederates, and the capture of Lot and all his household. At once he armed his servants, born in his own house, whose number, all told, amounted to only three hundred and eighteen, and pursued after the captors. What a striking instance of moral courage and unwavering reliance on divine assistance did this act proclaim! Here were the united armies of four kings, who *had just overthrown* the united armies of the

kings of the Plain; slain two of them in battle; and, flushed with victory and laden with spoil, returning from their conquest. Neither did Abram call upon his confederates to assist him in rescuing his brother Lot, but undertakes the mighty enterprise alone. Yet, conscious of his inability to cope with them in battle array, he divides his servants into bands, attacks them by night, overthrows them, and redeems his brother Lot from captivity, and restores him to his home and friends. The number of servants marshalled by Abram, corresponds very closely with the chosen army of Gideon, when he attacked the Midianites, seven hundred years after, in the Plain of Jezreel.

A century had shed its wintry snows on the head of the venerable patriarch, when God appeared to him, and changed his name from Abram to Abraham, in token of the covenant he had established with him, that he should be the father of many nations. He also promised him a son to be born of Sarai, the beloved wife, whose name he changed to Sarah, in token thereof. Well, indeed, might the venerable couple laugh with *mingled* joy and incredulity at the promise of a

son to them in their old age, when, in the due course of age and of nature, such an event seemed impossible.

One bright summer day the sun was shining fierce and unclouded, and Abram sat in the door of his tent under the shadow to avoid the heat. Lifting up his eyes, lo, three men stood beside him. One, from his superior air and commanding features, seemed to be more important than his companions. Arising, and bowing himself even to the ground before them, he addressed the leader and begged them not to pass by him, but turn in and partake of refreshment. This they consented to do, when Abram hastened to prepare and set meat before them, under the tree near the door of his tent. Having partaken thereof, their first inquiry was for Sarah; who, being in the tent-door behind him, stood listening to the conversation. What a scene for a painter! The white-bearded patriarch of a hundred years listening with calm and respectful reverence to the angelic visitants, his face radiant with hope, as the eye of faith travels down the opening vista of coming years, and the countless multitudes *yet to be the offspring of his loins pass in dim*


and shadowy perspective before him the three angelic messengers addressing him, their azure wings furled, and their benignant countenances glowing with the radiant light of another world; behind them all, Sarah—the venerable matron—the childless wife—with her first mother’s curiosity in her every look and action, listening to the conversation that so intimately interests her, her cheek blushing with a new and undefined sensation of mingled shame, hope, and incredulity. At last the latter feeling predominates, and a smile plays along her lips as she hears the promise again reiterated to Abram, that she shall bear a son to him in his old age, who shall, in turn, be the father of a long, countless line. As her eye falls upon the time-furrowed countenance of her venerable husband, and the thought of her own great age looms up before her, she feels every moment the growing absurdity of the improbable announcement, and, in spite of all her efforts, a low, smothered laugh breaks forth. The angel hears it, and turns quickly round to rebuke her for her ill-timed mirth. But she is grave now—like the school-boy, when the eye of the master *falls suddenly* upon him;—and when he inquires

of Abram, Wherefore did Sarah laugh? she vainly attempts to deny it. But denials are useless before the Lord.

The angels, having accomplished their mission to Abram, turned their steps toward Sodom; while he courteously went with them a little way. He probably accompanied them as far as the summit of the ridge of mountains separating the Plains of Mamre from those of Jordan; whence a full view of the distant cities of Sodom and Gomorrah could be readily obtained. As his eye wandered in silent admiration over the goodly prospect stretched before him, Jehovah determined to reveal unto Abram the great event about to be enacted; and while two of the angels were sent forward to warn Lot to flee from the coming destruction, the third remained behind to communicate the dread event to Abram. Then it was that the compassionate patriarch, struck with the magnitude of the impending catastrophe, ventured to inquire if the Lord would also destroy the righteous with the wicked; and named fifty righteous persons as the possible number residing in the city. Then the Lord assured him that he *would spare the remainder* if that number could

be found. With many apologies for his presumptuous questioning, Abram gradually narrowed down the number of righteous persons to ten when the Lord assures him he will not destroy it if even that small number can be found. But alas ! for that doomed city, not even ten righteous persons are there.

The shades of night had again gathered over the sleeping world, and Abram and his household retired to rest ; but the approaching doom of those accursed cities so wrought upon the mind of the patriarch that he could scarcely rest. In the visions of night the fearful scene was before him ; and, awaking with the first dawn of light, he rose betimes, and hurried to the place where he had stood the evening previous with the angel, looking down toward the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. All was yet dark—one mass of shadow. As the light increased, and objects at a distance became visible, he saw, and lo ! from all the cities of the plain rose a black, sulphurous cloud, like the smoke of a great furnace. God's bolt had fallen. The mingled clouds of smoke and steam, curling upward like an ascending mist, *told in mute yet intelligible language that God's*




vengeance was complete. Like a funeral pall, spread that black canopy over the mighty ruins.

The Plain of Mamre is celebrated as the chosen burial-place of the patriarchs. When Jacob found his end approaching, after calling his children around him, and giving them his parting blessing, he charged them to bury him in the cave that is in the field of Macphelah, which is before Mamre, being the same Abraham had purchased of the sons of Heth. "There," said the dying patriarch, "they buried Abraham, and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac, and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah;" and so anxious was he to be buried with his fathers, that he made his son Joseph take an oath to carry him up out of Egypt to the land of Canaan, for burial in his fathers' sepulchre. Accordingly, after the seventy days were expired which the ancient Egyptians required to embalm a body, viz., thirty in preparation and forty in embalming, the body of Jacob was taken up to the land of Canaan, and deposited in the cave of Macphelah: a large concourse of Egyptians accompanying the Israelites on this melancholy occasion. *Even the inhabitants of Canaan were*

struck with the magnitude and solemnity of the procession, and said one to another, "This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians;" and in token thereof, called the place Abel-mizraim, a name signifying mourning.

There is something peculiarly solemn and impressive in this last request of the dying patriarch to sleep with his fathers in the cave of death. Joseph was all-powerful at the court of Pharaoh, and at his bidding the Egyptians would have built him a gorgeous mausoleum, or laid him to rest in the bosom of one of their gigantic pyramids. But the dying patriarch had no wish for grandeur. His heart was away among the green hills and smiling vineyards of his native land. By the side of his beloved Leah there was a quiet nook, whose placid stillness seemed to invite him; and there, with his ancestors around him, he felt that he could indeed sleep, undisturbed, "that sleep that knows no waking."

Philosophers may prove the chemic dissolution of the body, and demonstrate how, day by day, the living tenement is changing its form and elements: that death is only a sudden pause in the *wheel of life*—a changing of the scenes—a shadow



fitting for a moment over the sun of existence ; yet, after all, the fond heart clings to the memory of the departed, and loves to dwell on the pleasing thought of mingling their dust together in that land of deepest shade.

A thousand years later, and the city of Hebron had gradually risen over the patriarch's grave. Here David, the holy Psalmist and sweet singer, was anointed king, and reigned seven years over Israel. Here he poured out his soul in melody, and swept with trembling hand the strings of that glowing harp, whose immortal strains will vibrate through the countless ages of eternity. Here the treacherous Joab smote the unsuspecting Abner under the fifth rib ; and here the unnatural son Absalom made his headquarters when he rebelled against his indulgent father. The city of Hebron has played an important part in all the mutations and changes to which the Holy Land has been subject. It was once utterly destroyed by Joshua, and afterward rebuilt and given to Caleb for possession ; was a city of refuge ; a fenced city ; and a city dedicated to the use of the sons of Levi. It is now an important place,

being only inferior in population to Jerusalem itself.

The Plains of Mamre still exist in all their loveliness, as bright and beautiful as when trodden by the feet of the patriarchs. The brook Eschol yet steals along, its silver thread linking pasture, meadow, orchard, and vineyard together. The Mountains of Judah swell up on the right hand and on the left, clad in their robes of perennial green. The patriarch's tree is no more. A Turkish mosque encloses the cave of Macphelah, with all its sacred dust. Into this mosque no Christian is permitted to enter. Yet nothing can desecrate the ground once hallowed by the presence of Jehovah, and pressed by the footsteps of his angels. In all coming time, the Plains of Mamre are *sacred*.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PLAINS OF MOAB.

THE Plains of Moab lie east of the Dead Sea and River Jordan. The Arnon, running through the midst, divides them into two parts. A low range of mountains, called Abarim, extending from the southern part of the Dead Sea to Mount Gilead, again subdivides them east and west. On the east, they extend to the borders of the Great Desert, into which they gradually sink ; and on the west, form a succession of elevated terraces, like gigantic steps, down to the shores of the Jordan and Dead Sea.

The children of Israel, having come up by way of the wilderness, and driven out the Amorites, were encamped on the Plains of Moab, over against Jericho. In this dilemma, the king and *princes of Moab* were sore afraid, and, in the

emphatic language of Scripture, "*greatly distressed because of the children of Israel.*" And truly had they cause to fear. In ancient times the Moabites had possessed the whole plains from the southern part of the Dead Sea to Mount Gilead; but the Amorites had warred against them, and wrested all that portion lying north of the River Arnon from them; and their martial prowess was so superior to that of the Moabites, that it had passed into a proverb:—" *Wo unto thee, oh Moab, thou art undone; thy sons, after being shot at, are led into captivity with thy daughters, by Sihon, king of the Amorites, from whose royal city, Heshbon, has gone forth a fire and a flame that has consumed Ar of Moab and the lords of the high places of Arnon.*"


Yet, on a sudden, this warlike people had been utterly overthrown; their cities and villages taken possession of by a strange people come out of the wilderness, and they were now encamped over against them. Reasoning from analogy, they might well conclude that they were utterly unable to oppose or resist them, since their conquering enemies, the Amorites, had been overcome and swept away. "Now shall this company

lick up all that are around them, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field," said the king of Moab to his princes. In this strait it was resolved by them to call in superhuman aid, since their own mortal power was insufficient to resist them. Accordingly, messengers were despatched to Balaam the son of Beor, who dwelt at Pethor in Mesopotamia, to come and curse the children of Israel : experience having taught Balak, king of Moab, that he was a prophet whose blessings and cursings were all-powerful to build up or cast down those on whom they were pronounced. So the elders of Midian departed on their mission, with the rewards of divination in their hands.

Already the day was closing in when they arrived and made known to Balaam their mission. He, wishing to take counsel from his pillow, besought them to remain with him till the morning ; if God granted him permission he was willing to accompany them. But God appeared to him in the visions of night and forbade him to accompany them, as the people he was called upon to curse were a blessed people. So the princes of Balak were dismissed in the morning with the peremptory refusal, "*Get you into your*

land : for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you."

But Balak was not to be so easily put off. Princes more and more honourable were despatched. The rewards of divination increased. Earnest entreaty was added. Balak besought him to let nothing hinder him from coming to him ; for he would promote him to very great honour, and would, moreover, do every thing he might say unto him. We can, from this moment, clearly trace the gradual yet invisible changes passing over the mind of Balaam, as those magnificent offers pass in silent review before it. Instead of rejecting them at once, and dismissing the messengers, he contents himself with asseverating, in stronger language than ever, his unchangeable devotion to the word of the Lord. A house full of gold and silver will not make him go beyond this, to do less or more. Yet he is willing to make another trial, and prays them to remain with him till the morrow, that he may see what the Lord will say *further* unto him. Alas ! how many a Christian minister has felt like Balaam when a richer benefice has suddenly *spread itself* before him.



Having received permission to go with the messengers, on condition of faithfully declaring God's word, Balaam rose betimes, saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. Two servants accompany him. His heart is elated with the prospect. God, who has hitherto been unchangeable in his commands, is evidently turning. The first night he had forbidden him to go; the next he had granted permission. Perchance he may yet allow him to curse the Israelites—a *little*—just a *little*: enough to secure the promised rewards of Balak. Like the natural sun, moving apparently through the blue vault of heaven, Balaam fancied the Sun of Righteousness was moving in his orbit, when, alas! it was only the dark world beneath his feet, rolling away from his enlightening beams.

Thus journeying along, on a sudden the ass he bestrode bolted through an open gateway into an adjoining field. The action was so quick and sudden that Balaam was well-nigh dismounted; but, recovering himself, he lustily belaboured the refractory animal until it was again willing quietly to follow its advancing companions.

They soon after passed along between two

parallel walls, bordered on each side by a smiling vineyard. The vines hung over the walls on either side, their dark green leaves glistening with the morning dew. Suddenly the ass rushed aside: and, bursting the lacings of Balaam's sandal, crushed his foot against the wall, sending a thrill of pain through his entire body. Balaam was angry. Thick and fast fell the blows from his heavy staff upon the head, neck, and body of the offending animal. Between each blow a fierce imprecation burst forth. It was with the greatest difficulty he could keep his mind fixed on the sacred mission before him; for the pain of his crushed foot was intolerable. As the pain, however, gradually subsided, calmer feelings came over him. He dismounted, bound up the wounded limb, and followed his companions, who had passed on some distance before him.

The walls leading through the vineyard had gradually converged together until a narrow pathway only remained. Balaam was just beginning to congratulate himself that his beast could no longer swerve aside, when suddenly, as if smitten by a thunderbolt, the ass fell beneath

him, and lay trembling on the ground. The shock was so violent and unexpected that Balaam was hurled forward to the ground, bruised and almost stunned by the sudden concussion.

The prophet was now thoroughly roused. His fury knew no bounds. Before the unloosed storm of his wrath all other thoughts vanished away. Gathering himself up from the ground, and grasping his staff with both hands, he rushed upon the trembling and panting animal quivering on the ground before him. Kicks, cuffs, blows, and bitter maledictions were rained in rapid succession upon the prostrate beast : and so carried away was he by the storm of passion that he heeded not the miracle which followed.


“What have I done unto thee that thou hast smitten me these three times ?” humbly inquires the ass of Balaam. “Because thou hast mocked me,” shouted the enraged prophet in reply, “and I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee.” Again the beast replies, and lo, the scales fall from Balaam’s eyes, and a mighty angel, with flashing sword and frowning countenance, stands over against him. Like the storm-vexed waves of Galilee, stilled by the

voice of Christ, the presence of that angel sink the waves of anger rolling over his bosom. His passion is all gone now, and, with fear and trembling, he falls flat upon his face by the side of his prostrate quadruped.

The angel, after rebuking him for smiting his faithful beast, informs him that but for his turning aside he had now been slain. Balaam very humbly acknowledges his sin, and offers to return if it is displeasing to the Lord. But God having warned him not to depart from the word revealed, suffers him to proceed with the prince of Balak.

No sooner was it known in Moab that Balaam the prophet was surely coming, than Balak went out to meet him. The princes of the land were all gathered together, and the remainder of the day devoted to sacrifice and feasting: the important business upon which he had come being deferred till the morrow.

It must have been a thrilling moment to the assembled multitude gathered together on the heights of Baal, when Balaam returned from meeting the Lord. A bullock and a ram had *been offered* on each of the seven altars erected



by Balak. The smoke was yet ascending from the burnt sacrifice. The princes of Moab stood around, each taking precedence according to rank. Far down, stretching along the plain, the countless tents of Israel glittered in the flashing sun. Balaam had gone to a grove, on the top of a distant hill, to meet the Lord. He was now returning from the awful presence : and, like the electric rod, was about to discharge the living thunders of his God upon their distant foes. Breathless with awe, they stand aside and make way for him as he approaches. With kindling eye he strides forward, waves his hand and exclaims, "Balak, the king of Moab, hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy me Israel. How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed ? or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied ? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him ; lo ! the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and number the fourth part of Israel ?"

As the prophet finished his parable he smote his hands together, and the spirit of prophecy

passed away. He was no longer the lamp of life through which the lamp of science shined out upon a darkened world. He was no longer the wire, he had glowed for a moment, and then all was over. He had passed into a reverie, and the passing had faded away. Gone was Balak, the king of Moab. Gone were the children of the promised rewards for the faithful. The end of all things was before him. He voluntarily exclaimed, "Let not the righteous, and let my last days be the doors of his fathers' sepulchres, to receive their prophetic descendants."

We can imagine the surprise of Balak and the princes of Moab at the termination of their last days. He had poured blessings upon their terrible enemies. They were too thoroughly afraid, both of the renowned prophet, to meet him. Looking down over the extensive array of his army, Balak imagined at once that he was overwhelmed and carried away by the imposing array before him.

see a part of the Israelites' camp, perhaps he might be courageous enough to curse them. So he brought him to the field of Zophim, on the summit of Pisgah, whence only the utmost part of the camp could be seen, the rest being hidden by the projecting crest of the mountain on the north side.

Again seven altars are built unto the Lord, and a bullock and a ram offered on every altar. Again Balaam withdraws to a distance from Balak and the princes of Moab, to meet the Lord. Again the Lord puts a parable into his mouth and sends him with it to Balak : " Rise up and hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor ; God is not a man that he should lie ; neither the son of man that he should repent : hath he said and shall he not do it ? or hath he spoken and shall he not make it good ? He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverse-ness in Israel. The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt ; he hath, as it were, the strength of a unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there divination against Israel. Behold, the people

shall rise up as a great lion, and lift himself up as a young lion ; he shall not lie down till he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain."

He ceased : and Balak now wished him to neither bless them at all nor curse them at all. But on Balaam's assuring him that what the Lord spoke that he must communicate, he was willing to try once more the chances of another place, "if peradventure it might please God to allow him to curse them from thence." So he brought him to the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon.

There is something so pertinacious in the attempts of Balak to procure a curse for his enemies, that we cannot but admire his patriotism. First he brought Balaam to a place where he could see the whole body of Israelites abiding in their tents. *A blessing descended.* Next he took the prophet to a place where only a small remnant could be seen. *Another blessing followed.* As a last chance, he brought him to a place where no Israelites could be seen, but instead thereof a place accursed of God a thousand years before. From the top of Peor toward Jeshimon

the eye falls on a frightful, howling wilderness. The Dead Sea rolls between. Far down along its western shores the curse which overwhelmed the cities of the Plain is still burning and blasting over its arid and scathed surface. Not a shrub or blade of grass can be seen, save, perchance, a few stunted bushes on the brow of the cliffs beetling over the Dead Sea. These are the mysterious apple-trees of Sodom, whose fruit inside is dust and bitter ashes. The wind sighs mournfully as it sweeps along over the barren sand, like the blast of autumn among the marshy sedge, where the cold toad croaks, and the withered leaf is spotted like a leprosy. For a hundred miles in length, far down round the southern shores of the Dead Sea, extends that region of the Shadow of Death, and with his eyes upon it, Balaam was again called upon to curse Israel.

Once more the altars are built and sacrifices duly offered. But Balaam, finding it pleases the Lord to bless Israel, did not go as before to meet him; but took up his parable and said, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as

the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar-trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt : he hath, as it were, the strength of a unicorn : he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and shall pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion : who shall stir him up ? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

What a wonderful contrast between the scene before him and the inspired words of Jehovah ! No wonder Balak smote his hands together in despair, and complained of Balaam that instead of cursing his enemies he had blessed them three times. But Balaam had not yet finished. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and Moab, Edom, Amalek, and the Kenites come in successively for their share of denunciation. At last he finished, exclaiming in mournful accents, "Alas ! who shall live when God doeth *this* ?" and all was over. The wand of pro-

phesy was broken. The glazed oriel through whose stained tracery the Sun of Righteousness had shone for a moment, revealing the shadows of the future, was shattered for ever.

Of the pernicious counsels afterward given by Balaam, I need not speak. By his directions a snare was spread for the feet of the children of Israel. The daughters of Moab enticed them to sin. A plague was sent upon the Israelites and thousands perished. But the career of the wily prophet was short. Ere another year had passed away he was captured and slain. The curse of Jehovah settles upon his memory ; and he is numbered with those wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

The Plains of Moab are noted as the scene of a remarkable deliverance to the combined armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom, in the days of Elisha the prophet. They had fetched a compass of seven days' journey round the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, and were about invading Moab from the South. Their course had been through the wilderness of Judah, on the western side of the Dead Sea, and now, on *approaching the boaders of Moab*, their supplies

of water had failed. In this extremity the three kings went down to the residence of Elisha, the son of Saphet, to beg his intercession with God on their behalf. They were indeed at fearful issue : their soldiers perishing with thirst ; their cattle dying around them in every direction. Unless assistance was speedily obtained, they must be overwhelmed.

After taunting the king of Israel for not calling upon the prophets of his father and upon the prophets of his mother in this his dire extremity, and declaring that it was on account of the king of Judah alone that he was willing to call upon the Lord, Elisha called for a minstrel to play before him. As the minstrel's hand run over the strings, and the warbling wire began to sound, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he began to prophesy : " Thus saith the Lord, make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord, ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain ; yet that valley shall be filled with water that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts."

It must have seemed a toilsome and hopeless task to the soldiers digging the trenches pre-


scribed by the prophet. As they shovelled out the hot and scorching sand, and made long, deep ditches through the camp, the idea of seeing them immediately filled with pure and wholesome water must have seemed utterly preposterous. The scorching days—dewless nights—windless atmosphere, and cloudless skies, prognosticated any thing but rain. Yet, on a sudden, the water came by the way of Edom, and the trenches were filled.

The lurid beams of the morning sun, reflected back from the mirrored surface of the water, induced the Moabites to believe that the confederated kings had quarrelled, and slain each other. They dreamed not that the crimson pools before them were water and not blood. In wild and broken disorder they rushed down upon the camp, anticipating nothing but spoil. But they soon found their mistake; and, conquered, slain, and utterly overthrown, their king was at last reduced to the dread necessity of offering his eldest son a burnt-offering upon the wall ere the wrath of the avenger was stayed.

The Plains of Moab were the scene of one of those *touching instances* of domestic affection

which, like the honey of long-gathered flowers, sweeten the cup of life. Elimelech, an Israelite, to avoid the famine which desolated his native land, had gone to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and two sons. He died, and his two sons took them wives of the daughters of Moab. They also died, and Naomi was left alone with her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpha. Having learned that the Lord had again given the Israelites bread, she determined to return to the bosom of her family. So, calling her two daughters-in-law, she thanked them for all their kindnesses unto herself and her departed sons, kissed them, and bade them return to their mothers' house. Orpha obeyed; but Ruth clave unto her mother-in-law. "Entreat me not," said she, "to leave thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more alas if aught but death part thee and me."

Of the after history of the faithful Moabitess it is unnecessary to speak; or the successive steps by which the lovely gleaner became the wife of the



rich Boaz. Her devotion was rewarded. Ere the fourth generation had passed away, her descendants sat upon the throne of Israel. A long line of mighty kings succeeded, closed by the blessed Messiah. In after years, the armies of David were marshalled on her plains, warring against her people. The array of battle was there, and the pomp and pageantry of war. Yet never did those Plains smile so sweetly, or the flowers enamelling their bosom shed so rich a perfume, as when that lone mother wandered over them, seeking her kindred, with her beautiful and devoted daughter-in-law tripping behind her.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLAINS OF JERICHO.

THE Plains of Jericho lie north-east of Jerusalem, and are about six leagues long and three wide. A low range of barren, chalky hills bounds them on the south-west and north. Eastward, the River Jordan sweeps along, dividing them from the plains of Moab. Beyond it, swelling upward, Mount Pisgah towers aloft; and still further, away in the blue distance, Mount Gilead greets the rising sun. Northward, Mount Lebanon rears its whitened head, covered with eternal snows, and waves its tall cedars in the passing breeze. Far in the west the mountains that girdle Jerusalem reflect the last rays of expiring day.

The Plains of Jericho were formally noted for *their* extraordinary fertility, and the number and

beauty of their evergreen palms. The city of Jericho itself was called the City of Palms : and in every vale, and by every streamlet, they flourished in glorious luxuriance. In all Palestine—that blessed land, where the Day-star of Redemption first twinkled, and over which the Sun of Righteousness first rose with healing under his wings—no fairer plains or lovelier scenes meet the eye, as from the heights of Nebo, the summit of Pisgah, we look down upon the glorious landscape, unrolled like a mighty map before us.

The children of Israel had passed over Jordan and encamped on the Plains of Jericho. The reproach of Egypt had been rolled away : the host circumcised. Already had they eaten of the fruit of the land, and the mysterious descent of manna ceased. A stupendous miracle had been re-enacted, with increased power. When their fathers came out of Egypt, the Red Sea had parted before them : its saline waters becoming a crystal wall unto them on the right hand and on the left. They had passed securely through its fathomless depths, which the pursuing Egyptians essaying to do, were overwhelmed and destroyed. *With two exceptions*, the living witnesses to that

sublime miracle had paid the debt of nature. Moses, the great captain and lawgiver, whose potent rod had smitten the waters, led the captives out of Egypt, and guided the host forty years through the wilderness, was dead. He had ascended Mount Pisgah, and from its summit, called Nebo, taken one parting look at the promised land, and then calmly laid him down to die. It was in vain they had sought the ruined tenement of clay, to give it the rites of sepulture. God had buried it: not on the summit of that storm-swept mountain, wrapt in clouds and thick darkness, but far down in a quiet valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-poer. There, warmed by the hallowed influence of the sun, and consecrated by the dews of heaven, the great captain slept alone: his grave unknown, lest perchance the Israelites, in their blind zeal and fondness for idolatry, should gather round it to worship.

How prone is this world to unbelief! The truths of to-day become doubts to-morrow. The clouds of scepticism gather over the sun of religion, and the shield of faith is dimmed with *the rust* of suspicion. Moses, says the infidel,

was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians: might he not have smitten the waters of the Red Sea with his magic rod at a time when an unusual tide, receding from the shore, left a dry passage through the weltering waters? Methinks the teachers of Moses would have been at least as wise as their pupil, and not ventured a pursuit subject to such overwhelming destruction. At all events, the miracle just enacted could be open to no such deception. Here was a swift, turbulent river, surging onward in mad career to the sea, its current suddenly arrested, and foaming waters piled up in mighty heaps, until the crystal avalanche reached up as far as the city of Adam, that is beside Zaretan. No long-continued drought or parching winds had dried up the river, and shrunk its waters to less than their ordinary volume. On the contrary, the frequent April showers, called in Scripture the "latter rains," and the bright summer sun, had melted the snows on Mount Lebanon, and the thousand mingling streams had swollen the waters of the Jordan till the banks overflowed; and this, says the sacred historian, was a *thing* of common occurrence during

the time of harvest. Hence the grandeur of the miracle.

Two memorials had been erected ; one in the very midst of Jordan, on the sacred place where the ark of God had paused ; the other had been pitched in Gilgal, where the Israelites encamped ; and the swollen river had returned back to its original bounds, as foaming and impetuous as ever.

The city of Jericho is straitly shut up. None go out or come in. The hearts of her king and mighty men sink with fear. Well may they be dismayed. A mighty army, flushed with victory, is approaching their walls ; a victorious chieftain is leading them forward ; an unknown and mysterious God is marching before them. Before his triumphant steps, nature trembles, and pauses in full career : the swelling Jordan shrunk back affrighted, and gave them a dry passage through its waters. What, now, can save them ? Perchance those high and solid walls that gird their city may yet baffle the foe. Happily, they have no engines of war. How can they scale those protecting bulwarks ? *her* warriors fight manfully ? Yet, a myste-

rious dread is on every mind, and a sinking fear in every bosom.

The bright sun is shining. The tall palms quiver in his noontide beams. All nature droops, for it is midday hour. The children of Israel sit some in the doors of their tents, while others repose under their grateful shadow. The herds of cattle and flocks of sheep have sought the cooling shade of the spreading palms or beetling rocks. Even the banners of the host droop despondingly and trail in the dust. The winds have died away, overpowered by the burning radiance of the noonday sun. All nature seems to pause, and the host sunk in calm repose or listless indifference.


Not so the vigilant leader. He, leaving his resting companions behind, had approached the enemy's city, and was silently viewing its massive towers and frowning walls. On a sudden an armed warrior, with drawn sword, stood over against him. With lion heart, Joshua accosts the threatening soldier, and boldly asks him, "Art thou for us or for our adversaries?" With answer frank as the questioning captain, the *mysterious warrior* answered, "Nay ; but as Cap-

gain of the host of the Lord am I now come." Joshua was confounded. Awe-stricken, he sunk down to the earth, and worshipping the unknown visitant, humbly inquired, "*What saith my Lord unto his servant?*" When Moses was sent as a deliverer to the Israelites groaning in Egypt, as the seal of his commission, God appeared to him in a flame of fire. A burning bush unconsumed was the symbol of his presence; and as the future lawgiver gazed with wonder on the dazzling sight, a voice was heard commanding him to loose his shoes from off his feet, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground. The mission of Moses was ended; yet the same command still passed on to his successor; and that he might know it was the self-same power which had guided the host, the same command was issued:—"*Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.*" Thus God's commands are one. The flaming bush, and sword-armed warrior, arrest but the outward sense, to convey alike the sublime behest. After Moses had bared his feet before the Lord, God gave him instructions what he should do in Egypt. On the present occasion, when Joshua had done the

same, God gave him instructions for capturing the walled city before him. No huge towers, overtopping those on the wall, were to be erected. No battering-rams were to thunder against them. No mangonels or catapults were to fling stones or hurl darts against it. On the contrary, the armed warriors were to pass on before. The ark of the covenant was to follow them, and Israel's unarmed multitude was to form the rearward. In silence that strange procession was to march. Through that lengthening host no sound was to break forth, save the clarion notes of seven trumpets of rams' horns, to be blown by seven priests. Day by day that mute procession was to encompass the city, until the chosen moment when the Lord should deliver it into their hands.

To an observer looking down from Mount Nebo, the scene below must have been one of passing wonder. The sun had hardly yet risen on the earth, when the great captain arose from his couch. A thin mist, curling upward, reveals the white tents of Israel gleaming in the soft light of early dawn. Jordan, with its flooded banks, *like a sea of molten silver*, is sweeping

onward. Far in the east, the level rays of the rising sun gild the rugged peaks of Mount Gil-ead, and project its mighty shadow far over the plain. What a magnificent scene! The fields white unto the harvest, girdled with palms stretch away in endless succession on every side. But the heart is not there. The living panoramas below has a deeper attraction. Yonder move the embattled warriors of Israel. With sheathed swords, upraised lances, and suspended shields they silently march onward. As rank after rank presses forward, the ark of the covenant brings up the rear. Seven priests, blowing each a trumpet of ram's horn, bear its sacred burden. Behind them, at a respectful distance, press the unarmed multitude. Not men alone are there. The daughters of Israel are following, and even the children are not excluded. The camp is deserted. In silence they march. Throughout all that advancing host, no sound is heard save the clarion notes of those seven trumpets. The defenders of Jericho rush to the walls. Her mighty men, with throbbing hearts and quivering limbs, gird on their armour for the approaching conflict. Words of encouragement pass along



from lip to lip and from rank to rank. The strong encourage the weak, and each exhorts the other to be valiant and quit themselves like men.

But Israel's host approach not their walls. At a distance, with slow and measured tread, they pass around the city, and, returning to the camp, leave that beleaguered fortress unassailed.

Jericho is electrified. Israel's embattled host have returned to their camp without venturing an attack. Round the city they have marched, seeking a vulnerable point, but finding none. Hearts now beat high with courage, that a few hours ago sunk dismayed ; and when night again drew her mantle over the city, what sounds of revelry, boasting, and blasphemy, rolled out on the night-blast as its accursed defenders recounted the successful issue of that day's attack.

Morn again dawns upon the earth, and the pageant of yesterday is re-enacted. Again the warriors of Israel pass on before the shadow of that priest-borne ark ; again the sons and daughters of Israel follow its advancing footsteps. Again the defenders of Jericho man the walls, *and march onward over against the Jewish host.*

Vain precaution ! The children of Israel attack them not. With the order and regularity of the preceding day, they encompass the city and return to their tents. Jericho is unmolested.

Thus, day by day, the city was encompassed, till the six times were accomplished which God had commanded. We can imagine the successive increase of confidence in the defenders of Jericho as demonstration after demonstration passed harmlessly by. At first, surprise and fear held them mute ; but soon, scoffs—jeers—taunts—and bitter revilings succeeded. It must have been a hard trial to the children of Israel to march thus, day by day, around their enemies, forbidden to speak or return in any way the scornful revilings of the exultant foe. We can imagine the stern wrath gathering in their hearts as, with clenched hands, compressed lips, and nervous tread, the silent warriors march gloomily onward. It must have required all the awe-inspiring authority of Joshua to prevent them rushing forward at once against the accursed city. But faith triumphed, and, like seeming fools, for six days they encompassed the city.

But the seventh has come at last—blessed day

of God-given rest—the holy Sabbath. Alas! this one is consecrated to vengeance. The people awake at earliest dawn. Twilight yet quivers on the brow of night when the host again put themselves in array. Tremble, accursed city! The angel of destruction is on the march. Ere night again folds her mantle round thy children, his sword will have flashed along thy towers, and quivered in thy bosom. The warriors of Israel march forward with alacrity. That hold of scoffers, revilers, and blasphemers is nodding to its fall. No longer, with slow and measured step, they tread the well-remembered circle. On this eventful day they have to encompass the city seven times. Round and round they sweep. Those who faint with the noontide heats are supported by their companions, until, at last, the weary task is accomplished. The seventh circuit is finally completed—and the bell of vengeance tolled.

The summer sun hangs low in the west. His parting beams bathe the host in a flood of living light. The voice of Joshua is heard, bidding them shout, for the Lord has delivered the city into *their hands*. With swelling lungs and

straining throats, they joyfully obey him. A mighty shout peals forth ; and as the huge billow of sound rolls inward, and dashes against the lofty walls, they tremble from their deep foundations—totter—and hang for an instant poised in mid air. The next, with thunder crash and smoking ruin, they rush to earth, burying thousands in their fall, and filling the evening sky with clouds of choking dust.

Yet, amid this wreck of falling walls and crashing towers, one speck of the wall remains standing unharmed. The line of scarlet thread bound in its open window proclaims the dwelling of Rahab the harlot : she who concealed the spies sent by Joshua to view the city. Under that protecting roof are gathered her nearest and dearest kinsmen ; and, for her sake, the devouring sword passes over them. That symbol of blood is to them the herald of mercy, and the accepted faith of that erring sister their ark of safety. How often, in this changeful world, has the despised outcast of a lordly family proved its protecting shield.

The grim warriors of Israel march up, every man straight before him, into the now defence-

less city. Night curtains the skies, and waves her leaden sceptre over the sleeping earth. But the work of slaughter pauses not. Through the dim watches of that livelong night, the avenging sword is unsheathed. The streets float in gore, and the besom of destruction sweeps over the doomed city. With fire and sword it sinks in one wide-spread ruin, and when morn again dawns over the quiet earth, the meed of vengeance is complete.

Why should we dwell on the after history of this accursed city. A malediction was denounced upon its future rebuilder. He should lay the foundation in his first-born, and in his youngest son should he set up the gates of it. The words of prophecy are sure : and it was fulfilled in Hiel, the Bethelite, who laid the foundation thereof in Abiram, his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son, Segub.

The Plains of Jericho were the scene of another sublime demonstration of Jehovah's power. The prophet Elijah was to ascend in a whirlwind unto heaven. Already had he appointed his successor, and vainly striven to leave him behind *as he journeyed from city to city.* To all his en-

treaties, Elisha returned the same unvarying answer : "*As the Lord liveth, and thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.*"

The twain have arrived at Jericho. Here and at Bethel the sons of the prophets had questioned Elisha as to his knowledge of the great event about to happen. "*Yea, I know it,*" returned the sorrowing successor, "*hold ye your peace.*" They proceed to Jordan. As they approach its hallowed banks, Elijah strips off his mantle and smites the waters, which part hither and thither ; so they pass over on dry land.

We can imagine the thrilling rapture of the leathern-girdled prophet at the glorious termination of his earthly pilgrimage. From the foundation of the world, with one solitary exception, all had tasted the bitterness of death. The grave had swallowed them all. In its peaceful bosom slept the kings and mighty men of earth. All had bowed to the grim destroyer. In all coming time, no one should be thus exempt from the common doom. Even *He*, the blessed Son of God, was not spared. The cup was drunk in all its bitterness, and drained to the very dregs. O *mighty* Prophet ! gleamed there no enfolding

cross through the unrolled visions of the shadowy future, in this thy parting hour? Sawest thou not that glorious transfiguration on Mount Hermon—its glittering raiment, and its holy counsellors? Burst not on thy enraptured sight the glorious scheme of man's redemption, and the washing out of sins in the Saviour's atoning blood? But thy outward form is calm, and thy brow serene, as, turning to thy companion, thou askest him to prefer his last request.

What a sublime response does the prophet receive from his successor! He might have asked long life—riches—and high renown among his fellow-men. But no; his heart is in the work before him: "*Let, I pray thee, a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.*" Well might Elijah say, "*Thou hast asked a hard thing.*" He had indeed been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts. He alone had remained steadfast in the true faith. He had slain the priests of Baal, and thrown down his altars. As he looked back at his own devotion and singleness of heart, he felt it would be indeed very hard for his successor to exceed him. So he left the request to be granted or withheld, as pleased the will of Jehovah: "If

thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee ; but if not, it shall not be so."

Thus going on conversing together, lo, a chariot and horses of fire, descending from the summit of Mount Nebo. Elisha saw it approaching, and cried aloud, "*My father ! my father ! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof !*" Sweeping round in eddying circles, a mighty whirlwind carries him out of sight. He is gone from earth away ; but lo, his descending mantle waves along the ground. Elisha gathers it up ; and, smiting once more the waters of Jordan, passes over on dry land. The sons of the prophets, who had stood afar off gazing upon the sublime scene, seeing Elijah's spirit had descended upon Elisha, bowed down before him, and besought him to heal the bitter fountain at Jericho. The request was granted ; and Elisha was duly honoured as one qualified to fill the place of the translated prophet.

The Plains of Jericho still exist in all their beauty ; but the hand of the spoiler is there. The River Jordan still rolls its bright water along, but the sacred memorials have vanished for ever. Tall palms still quiver in the glad sun

light, and shake their green plumes in the passing breeze, but all else, how changed ! The sons of Israel are scattered abroad through the whole earth—a sword drawn after them—and fear and trembling in all their joints. A few miserable Arabs occupy their inheritance—their squalid huts dotting the plain. Great are the inscrutable decrees of Jehovah, and his wisdom past finding out.



CHAPTER VI.

THE PLAIN OF SHARON.

As the western voyager sails over the blue Mediterranean, on approaching the shores of Palestine, the first object that greets his sight is Mount Carmel towering aloft, like a gigantic warder keeping his sleepless vigil over the portals of an enchanted castle. If he has come from beyond the Mediterranean, he remembers Calpa and Abyla, the Pillars of Hercules, and looks at once for the corresponding mountain on the northern promontory of the bay of Acre. But he looks in vain. A plain extends along the sea-coast, both north and south, away from Mount Carmel as far as the eye can stretch, backed in the far distance on the south by the mountains of Samaria, Judah, and Benjamin, and on the north by the hills of *Galilee*, and the snowy summits of Lebanon and

Mount Hermon. Landing at Mount Carmel, the traveller finds a narrow pathway winding along between the base of the mountain and the sea-coast, which gradually widens as he advances southward, until it expands into a plain of surpassing beauty. This is the Plain of Sharon: the land of lilies and roses, all blooming bright and beautiful as the gardens of perennial spring. Here the bland western breezes come creeping up from the bosom of the blue Mediterranean, all fresh and soft as the breath of morn. The sun here sets nightly in a sea of molten gold, and the morning day-star trembles along the distant hills that girdles Jerusalem and Bethlehem. In all Judea no fairer landscape greets the eye, as, from the brow of Carmel, the traveller looks down upon the opening plain, stretching off to the southward in boundless beauty before him.

Once on the summit of Mount Carmel, the thick-coming thoughts of the past crowd upon the mind with swelling and overwhelming power. Fancy unfurls her soaring wings, and backward flies to other scenes and other days. At the touch of her magic wand the gates of the Past *unfold*; and, like the stream of time rolling

between the mists of eternity, in the vision of Mirza, the mighty past rolls before us with all its deeds. Here, on this very spot, Elijah contended with the Priests of Baal, and the Lord answered him by fire. Yon silver stream, winding along round the eastern base of the mountain, is the brook Kishon, on whose banks the stern prophet slew the foes of Israel's God. Their blood crimsoned its waters, and tinged the crests of those shining waves now breaking on the shore. Here sat Elisha when the Shunamite caught him by the feet in speechless agony at the death of her beloved son. Far off to the south-west, over many a league of blue waves, a little cloud is rising from the sea, in appearance no bigger than a man's hand; but the practised eye knows at once that it is only distance that shrinks its proportions. As it comes landward its size dilates, and we feel at once that it is a younger brother of that blessed cloud which watered the land of Israel in the days of Elijah. But this passes southward over the Plain of Sharon.

Leaving Carmel and all its glorious associations behind, let us descend to the plain, and trace some of the great events transacted on its

bosom, now wet with the passing shower. Among the enemies of the children of Israel, none were so fast or so formidable as the Philistines. Joshua, the great Hebrew captain and warrior, was unable to conquer or drive them out of Canaan. The Judges were in continual conflict with them ; and there was sore war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. He was finally overcome by them, and slain on Mount Gilboa. Through all the Jewish history, they appear as the implacable antagonists of the Hebrews, sometimes serving, at other times lordling it over them. Often were they chosen by Jehovah as the dread instruments of punishment when Israel had rebelled against him, and God wished to chasten them back to duty. They dwelt in the southern part of the Plain of Sharon, in the south-western corner of Palestine, but the exact boundaries of their country cannot now be traced.

The Israelites had again rebelled, and God had delivered them into the hands of the Philistines. Not only had they prevailed against the Israelites in open combat, but they had taken the Ark of the *Covenant* among the spoils. At first the

Philistines were dismayed, and trembled exceedingly as they heard the shout of the Israelites go up, when the ark of the Lord was brought from Shiloh among them. *"Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines! lest ye become servants unto the Hebrews as they have been unto you. These are the mighty Gods that did such wonders in the land of Egypt—smote the first-born, and divided the Red Sea before them. In all our battles, the like hath never happened unto us before."* Thus exhorting each other, the Philistines join battle with the Israelites, and the sons of Jacob are overthrown. The Philistines do indeed quit themselves like men, for the ark of the Lord is taken. This was the greatest misfortune that ever befell the Israelites; for, prone as they were to be led away after the gods of the idolatrous nations surrounding them, there was yet in the heart of the nation a reverence for their own religion, and a proud feeling of consciousness that their own God was indeed more potent than any of the gods belonging to the idolatrous nations around them. Hence the daring presumption with which they brought the **ark** of the Lord into the camp as an auxiliary

helper, and the grievous disappointment when it was captured.

When the messenger brought the news unto Eli as he sat watching by the wayside, his eyes dim with age, and his heart trembling with fear for the safety of the precious ark, behold the exceeding beauty of the rhetorical figure, called climax, with which he announces the evil tidings : "*Israel hath fled before the Philistines; there hath been a great slaughter amongst the people; thy two sons, Hophni and Phineas, are slain; and the ark of God is taken.*" In the whole compass of language it has no equal ; and, such was the crushing effect of the last dread event upon the quivering nerves of Eli, that, like a tree struck by a thunderbolt, he tumbled backward, and broke his neck, for he was heavy, and well stricken in years, being nearly a century old.

We can imagine the joy and exultation that pervaded the Philistine army as they saw the Israelites fleeing before them. Their last desperate stand was before the ark, and around it is strewn the thickest swath of bleeding corpses. When they found the tide of battle turning against them, they would then gladly have borne

it away; but their enemies were too fierce and determined in the pursuit. Hophni and Phineas, as High Priests, having it in special charge, clung around it to the very last, their hands grasping the staves, and hot blood spurting on the sacred ark itself, when cloven down—many a proud Philistine lying around them, biting the dust, victims to the last desperate valour of the despairing Israelites.

When the spoils were gathered together, the ark was a subject of wonder and special comment. How wistfully the captors eyed its border of golden crowns, winged cherubim, and blue tapestry. We can almost hear the consultation in regard to its disposition—some in favour of melting the gold, burning the wood, and thus destroying Israel's God for ever; others recalling its deeds of old—the mysterious and awful power it possesses, and the danger of touching it. At last it is unanimously voted as a present worthy of being presented to Dagon himself, who alone has enabled them to capture it; so it is borne in triumph to his temple, duly presented to his wooden godship, and placed on a table before *him*.

It must have been a fearful omen to the superstitious Philistines, when they assembled next morning in the house of Dagon, to find the idol prostrate before the ark. Yet men love to trace effects to causes. Dagon was not securely fastened. A staple left out of the wall near his head, and a bolt omitted in one of his fins, are more than sufficient to account for his prostrate position. The workmen are straightway summoned, and after a reprimand for their carelessness in leaving their work unfinished, the idol is put back in its place and thoroughly secured. Dagon will not again lie prostrate before Israel's God, for the missing fastenings are now all in their places, and new ones added to make every thing doubly secure. Thus passed the day in restoring Dagon to his place, and securing him there.

Next morning, however, the consternation was greater than ever, when it was found that Dagon was again prostrate before the ark. This time the workmen were not blamed. They were clear *before*; that is plain *now*. There lies Dagon with his head and both the palms of his hands cut off, on the threshold; only his stump remains. The *solid wood broken across the grain, and bent*

irons wrenched from their sockets, tell in mute yet all-powerful language the force of that mighty power which plucked down the idol and rent it in pieces. As the priests of Dagon and the people throng into the temple to behold the ruins of their idol, a cloud covers the ark as of old. The glory of the Lord shines forth, and with fear and trembling the priests of Dagon hasten out of his temple, and never more is the foul idol reinstated in its place. Dagon is prostrate for ever in Ashdod, and the Philistines tremble at the power of Israel's God.

Disease now breaks forth among the inhabitants of Ashdod, and in all the coasts thereof. They are afflicted with emerods in their persons, and millions of mice devour the produce of their land. The men of Ashdod are determined to remove the evil by removing the cause; so they send and gather the lords of the Philistines together, and lay their grievances before them. The only remedy in their view seems to be, a removal to another city; so the ark is sent to Gath. But disease and destruction follow its footsteps. The people are smitten with emerods like the men of Ashdod, and legions of mice mar

the land. The ark is sent to Ekron; but the Ekronites refuse to receive it, as the hand of the Lord is upon them also, until the cry of the afflicted city goes up to heaven.

Seven months had now passed away, during which the ark of the Lord had sojourned in Philistia's land; and during that time, what a mighty change had been wrought in the minds of the Philistines concerning it. How triumphantly they had captured it! How joyfully they had deposited it in the temple of Dagon! Now its presence was a terror. Destruction followed its steps, and every thing perished around it. The only thought is how to get rid of it in the safest and quietest manner. The priests, lords, and divines are summoned, and the conclusion is unanimous to send it back to the land of Israel. They now feel that they have indeed committed a trespass in taking it, and a trespass-offering is at once prepared in return. God had afflicted them with living mice and living emerods. They acknowledged the trespass in gold, and return a golden mouse and a golden emerod for each of their five lords and five great cities. *These they put into a coffer by the side of the ark,*

and thus the Philistines give glory unto the God of Israel, and humbly beseech him to lighten his hand from of them, and afflict them no more.

It is harvest-time in Judea. Through all its valleys, and along its hill-sides, tall corn is waving. Between the Mountains of Judah the Valley of Beth-Shemesh opens out at its western extremity into the Plain of Sharon. As the people are busy reaping the golden grain, they see far off toward Ekron a slow procession approaching. As it draws nearer, they define it more distinctly. There are two kine yoked to a cart, whose lowings are plainly heard in the distance. The drivers stay behind, and let the cattle take their own course. Far off is a group of watching spectators. What can it surely mean? At last a flash of gold reveals its character. It is the ark—the glorious Ark of the Covenant returning once more to the land of Israel—self-delivered, self-redeemed—from its long sojourn in Philistia's smitten land.

The Plain of Sharon was the scene of another of those miraculous exploits with which the history of the Jewish nation is so thickly studded. It was here that Gideon, the Judge and Nazarite, whose great

bodily strength and moral infirmities have made him so remarkable above his compeers, had fearlessly entered Gaza, the principal city of the Philistines, in the pursuit of his darling passion. The inhabitants had become aware of his presence, and closed their gates upon him, intending to keep quiet through the watches of the night, that in the morning they might discover and slay him.

It is midnight. The moon rides high in heaven. Her silver radiance gilds leaf, tree, and flower, and bathes the blue surface of the distant sea in a flood of mellow light. The gentle night-breath moves seaward, and on its light wings an occasional cloud, like a bridal veil, steals over the face of the quiet moon, while a dim shadow, following its wake, glides over the plain. But yonder comes a deep shadow moving in a contrary direction. As it comes nearer, a huge gate, with doors, bars, and hanging posts, displays itself. It is Samson, who, awaking at midnight, and finding himself imprisoned in the enemy's city, laid hold of the iron gate to open it; but finding it fastened—the Spirit of the Lord being upon him—he tore up the posts from their deep

foundations, heaved the ponderous mass upon shoulders, and, marching over the plain, went not until he reached the top of a hill beyond Hebron, a distance of full thirty miles from where he deposited his enormous burden.

But the strong man was at last overcome. Delilah had wormed the fatal secret out of him, and on her lap he had been shorn of those locks wherein his strength lay. The Philistines bound him with fetters of brass, and put out his eyes; and now, a poor, weak, blind prisoner, was condemned to grind in the prison-house, to make sport for his cruel captors, who did not know that with his growing locks his strength was returning unto him.

It is a gala-day in Gaza. The lords and ladies of the Philistines, and all the people, are gathered together to see the



from their foundations, the Philistines perceive their danger, and shriek with dismay. Some spring forward to pluck him away, but in vain. "*Let me die with the Philistines!*" is his last request. Again he heaves at the pillars, and all is over. Down tumble roof, walls, and pillars, in one universal crash. The thousands on the roof, precipitated on the heads of the thousands beneath, hurry both to destruction. Death reigns triumphant—Samson is avenged. He has slain more at his death than all he ever slew in his life before.

The Plain of Sharon is remarkable as the first place where the middle wall of partition was broken down between the Jews and the Gentiles, and the latter admitted to partake of that grace which is alike equally free to all, whether Jew or Greek, barbarian or Scythian, bond or free. Peter had come to Joppa, at the request of certain disciples, to attend the funeral of Dorcas, a benevolent woman, "full of good works and alms-deeds which she did." Upon the prayer of Peter, the dead saint was restored unto life, and many were converted by the miracle to the Christian faith. Peter had resided there for some time, at

the base of the city, upon the seashore, with one Simon, a tanner. The apostle had gone up on the house-top at three o'clock in the afternoon, according to the custom of the Jews, for evening prayer. While there he fell into a trance, and saw the heavens opened—a great sheet, knit at the four corners, let down to the earth filled with all manner of four-footed beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air; and in answer to the invitation, “Arise, Peter, slay and eat,” he answered, “Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten any thing common or unclean.” Then did God instruct him that what He had cleansed, that was he not to call common or unclean. The thing was repeated thrice, and then received up again into heaven. While he yet doubted what it might mean, behold an immediate application of the vision. Three of those common and unclean Gentiles stood before the gate inquiring for him. Behold him, with all his characteristic ardour, in fulfilment of his new mission, pressing on his journey northward along the coast, through the Plain of Sharon, radiant in beauty still, with all its ancient fragrance and fertility. The gospel is preached to the Gentiles, and from this, as a

starting-point, is still travelling onward. The Rose of Sharon, to which Solomon likened the church of Christ, has been planted in many lands. It now blooms beside all waters. Its leaves are good for the healing of the nations, and under its shadow the weary and heavy-laden find peace and everlasting rest.

The Plain of Sharon is unchanged, save in the changing seasons, as they pass over it. The storm of battle has rolled over it, but the smoke has vanished. The Philistines are no more. They live in history only as the enemies of Israel—connected to them by eternal enmity. Gaza and Joppa still exist—the former an insignificant place, the latter the most venerable city of antiquity: tradition dating its origin even to years before the flood. “What countless generations of men, in this long lapse of years, have in this venerable city pressed successively through life, and passed away into eternity! Like the waves of the ocean that roll at the base of the city, its fleeting generations, age succeeding age, have arisen and rolled a moment on the restless tide of life, alternately gilded by the sunshine and darkened by the storm,

en sunk and mingled with their original
ements."

Consecrated by the footsteps of the ark, the
st day-spring of grace to the Gentile world,
e Plain of Sharon will be ever dear to the
ristian's heart, and held *sacred* in his list of
mortal memories.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLAINS OF SHILOH.

THE traveller who has visited Jerusalem, and stood upon the summit of Mount Zion, will remember tracing a road leading northward from the Holy City towards the Mountains of Samaria. This road, running through the centre of Palestine, and winding along the sides of the Mountains of Ephraim, gradually descends toward their base, until it debouches into a narrow valley, expanding northward into a succession of small but delightful plains. These are the Plains of Shiloh, celebrated in Jewish history as the chosen resting-place of the ark, from the time of Joshua's conquest until its capture by the Philistines at the disastrous battle of Ebenezer.

On the west the Mountains of Ephraim roll *their dark* summits along the sky, separating

them from the Plain of Sharon ; and on the east, a low range of barren, chalky hills, backed in the blue distance by the Mountains of Gilead, separates them from El Ghor, the valley of the Jordan. Northward, the Plains of Moreh lie between them and the Mountains of Samaria, and in the days of the patriarchs probably included them in their limits ; while far in the south, Mount Zion and Mount Moriah, like two sleepless watchmen, look down from their lofty turrets upon them.

In the days of Joshua these plains were uncommonly fertile, abounding in pastures, orchards, and magnificent vineyards. A beautiful fountain, trickling down from the rocks, falls into a natural reservoir at the head of a small glen, whence, welling up its clear waters, it runs away to the westward in a sparkling stream, until it meets the Mountains of Ephraim, through which it seems to have hewn its way between two perpendicular walls of rock. This is Shiloh's stream, which runs

“Fast by the Oracle of God.”

On its sacred banks the daughters of Shiloh came out yearly with timbrels and harps, to dance

in dances in honour of the ark. Here the Israelites held an annual feast ; and here they gathered together for counsel—the sacred ark seeming to overshadow the surrounding lands with its holy presence.

Joshua, having conquered the Canaanites and driven them out of the land, had assembled the Israelites on the Plains of Shiloh to divide the remaining inheritance among them by lot. It must indeed have been an exciting and interesting time to the assembled thousands gathered together for the purpose of receiving each his allotted portion. Not only was the grand division between the separate tribes to be then established, but, immediately succeeding it, the separate allotments of each family and individual were to be marked out. Hence every one had a separate and intense interest in the result. As tribe after tribe (arranged according to families) presses forward, we can almost read the contending emotions of their minds in the anxious countenances of each individual. It is indeed a thrilling moment in the life of every one present. As the lots determine, so must their future possessions lie. A chosen spot is in every heart : but will

the fatal lots assign it to them? The scales of hope and fear alternately raise and depress as the chances seem favourable or otherwise.

Joshua, like a careful general, had left nothing unprepared. Three commissioners from each tribe had been sent through the land to note its qualities, number its cities, and divide the whole into seven equal parts. This had been carefully recorded in a book prepared for the purpose, and given to Joshua, who used it as a guide on the final distribution.

Five tribes had already received their portions : three on the other side of Jordan ; Judah in the south, and Joseph in the north of Judea ; consequently there were now but seven unprovided for, and among those seven the lots are to be cast.

The preliminaries being arranged, the process of distribution began. First, Joshua read before the congregation the report of the commissioners, and the boundaries of each of the seven portions, with all their enclosed cities. Next, each of the divisions were numbered, and a corresponding number placed in a box before the ark. A solemn oath was then administered to the heads

of each tribe, binding them to accept without murmuring the portion allotted to them. Then all the congregation having arisen and stood bare-headed before the Lord, Joshua knelt and offered up a prayer that God would direct him aright in the choice of their lots of inheritance.

It must have been a solemn as well as interesting sight to see that war-worn chieftain kneeling before the ark, praying the God of Israel to guide his hand aright in this the final close of his labours on their behalf. Of the words we can know nothing, save that thanks must have mingled with his prayers to that omnipotent Being who had driven out his enemies before him, and led the host as it were step by step until God's heritage had been rescued from the grasp of the heathen, and the wicked Canaanites scattered like chaff before the wind.

The first lot, it appears, fell to Benjamin, to whom was assigned that portion lying between Judah and Ephraim. The next, to Simeon, to whom was allotted a portion of the land formerly assigned to Judah, it having proved too much for them. Then Zebulon, Issachar, Asher, and *Naphtali*, and finally the last lot fell to Dan,

whose portion proving too small, they were fain to enlarge it by the capture of Leshem, which they named Dan, in honour of their father.

Afterward the children of Israel gave Joshua an inheritance among them, viz., a city called Timnah-serah, in Mount Ephraim, where he dwelt, honoured and respected by the Israelites, and feared and dreaded by the Canaanites, yet remaining in the borders of the land.

The history of the Jewish nation, like that of an isolated individual, is very peculiar. Sometimes they were very devout, living close up to the requirements of their God-given law; at others, they were in open rebellion to it. From what we can learn of them from the light of revelation they appear to have been a very impressive people, often rebelling against Jehovah and relapsing into the grossest idolatry, and then as suddenly returning back to their allegiance, and punishing with the utmost severity those of their brethren who came not fully up to the measure of their newly-erected standard.

There had been a great breach in Israel. The children of Benjamin had been nearly exterminated, and that, too, by the swords of their

brethren. A certain Levite, with his concubine had been evil-treated in Jerusalem, belonging to the Benjamites, by certain sons of Belial. His concubine had been slain; and he, to arouse the Israelites to revenge her death, took the extraordinary resolution of dividing her into twelve parts, and sending one to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. This, like the cross of blood and fire despatched among the clans of Scotland, had thoroughly aroused them, and they had gathered together in Mizpeh to inquire into the matter. The Benjamites had been summoned to surrender the culprits, and on their refusal war had been declared against them. At first the Benjamites were victorious; but afterward they were conquered and slain, their cities burnt, and their inheritance laid desolate. Six hundred alone of all the tribe had escaped, and they had taken refuge in an inaccessible rock, situated in the wilderness, which they had made a temporary home.

But the hearts of the Israelites soon repented. The storm of anger had passed away, and the sun of mercy shone forth. They wept when they remembered that a tribe was lacking in Israel.

During their anger they had sworn a great oath, saying, "Cursed is he that giveth of his daughters to Benjamin to wife," and the women of Benjamin being exterminated, they were troubled to find wives for the six hundred remaining. So, after consulting together, and finding that there were none of the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead at the assembly, they sent and slew all the males, and reserved four hundred young maidens as wives for the bereaved Benjamites. Yet, notwithstanding, there was still a lack of two hundred, and the elders of Israel at last gave them permission to lie in wait in the vineyards, when the daughters of Shiloh came forth to dance their annual dance in honour of the ark, and then to capture each man a wife.

These annual feasts of the Israelites in honour of the ark were seasons of great national mirth and festive enjoyment. Like our own Thanksgivings, they were eagerly looked forward to as seasons of high revelry. From Dan to Beer-sheba the Israelites congregated, bringing with them their tents and stores of provision. They *generally lasted about three days, commencing*

with religious exercises, and frequently terminating in gluttony and drunkenness.

Methinks the scene is before me. The Israelites have gathered together, and encamped on the Plains of Shiloh,—the dark green carpet of grass, soft as velvet, is whitened with innumerable tents standing in long rows, decked with gay streamers, and festooned round the entrances with wreaths of palm and cedar leaves woven together. Shiloh's brook winds through the camp, its silver chain broken into endless links by numerous foot-bridges crossing it in various places. The forest-trees on the distant hills, and the surrounding vineyards, have all put on their greenest robes to meet the queen of spring passing over the plains. It is Nature's festival as well as man's; and the breath of spring is laden with the notes of feathered melody.

It is the last day of the feast. On the morrow the company will separate. The first day the weather was pleasant; but on the second it had suddenly changed. Shower after shower drenched the earth, and compelled the people to keep within their tents. But now the weather *has cleared up*, and the morning sun rises bright

and unclouded. The earth, like a smiling bride, puts on her sparkling jewels to meet him. The bland south wind comes warm and soft, fanning the cheek of beauty, and whispering in mysterious voices through the quivering palm-leaves.

The daughters of Shiloh have arrayed themselves in their best apparel for this joyous occasion. Their white tunics are girded round the middle with cinctures of palm-leaves; their light sandals are laced with thongs of black morocco; their hair is braided in wreaths, with intermingling roses. Thus arrayed, their leaders with timbrels and harps, the rest with branches of palm-leaves in their hands, they issue out between the tents and form upon the plain.

According to inmemorial custom, they are divided into twelve troops, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel; but on the present occasion, the tribe of Benjamin being exterminated, the daughters of Judah were divided into two bands, the smaller one representing Benjamin.

As they reach the plain, the ones bearing timbrels and harps file off together, and form an orchestra, round which, as a common centre, the different troops revolve. And now begins the

exhilarating scene. The timbrels and harps strike up—the dancers commence their joyous gyrations. Round and round the warbling minstrels, in eddying circles, crossing and recrossing in mazy folds, sweep the daughters of Shiloh. The air is filled with melody, and resonant with songs of praise: “HOSANNAH! GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST! HALLELUJAH! THE LORD REIGN-ETH, LET THE EARTH REJOICE!”

With these and other songs do the virgins chant to each other. It was for these annual gatherings that many of David's sweetest songs were composed. The songs and hymns, and branches of palm-trees cast in the way before Christ as he rode into Jerusalem, were taken from the ceremonies used on these joyous occasions; and Christ, as the King of Shiloh, was thus honoured by his followers in imitation of the daughters of Shiloh dancing round the ark.

Thus wheeling in circles round the minstrels, waving the branches of palm in their hands, dancing in unison with the music, and chanting hymns in honour of the ark, they heed not the waning day. The sun is slowly sinking behind *the Mountains of Ephraim*, and the long, blue

shadows are creeping over the plain. But yonder comes the full-orbed moon emerging from the line of green oaks that fringe the summit of Mount Gilead. The evening star is stealing forth, and trembles on the breast of Shiloh's murmuring stream. The scene is so soft, so calm, so beautiful, heaven seems almost stepping down to earth—its bright denizens unfurling their starry wings and leaving their blessed abodes to mingle once more, as in the days of old, with the daughters of men.

But the spell is suddenly broken. The daughters of Shiloh have passed along the edge of a vineyard whose long rows of grapes stand like ranks of embattled soldiers, and from behind them a body of intruders have rushed forth. They have grasped every man a maiden, and are now hurrying them away. The rest, like frightened deer, are fleeing toward the tents. All is confusion and dismay. As they arrive in breathless haste, and tell the astounding tale, the whole camp is aroused—mothers and fathers swelling with indignation—brothers and lovers storming furiously, and demanding arms, to pursue the kidnapping Benjamites who have thus dared to

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capture their sisters and sweethearts. At last, after great efforts, the elders are convened and the matter laid before them; but they are calm and composed, and to all appeals for vengeance only answer, "*Be favourable unto them for our sake, because we reserved not to each man his wife during the war.*"

It is not to be supposed that the maidens thus captured wept long and bitterly at the fate before them. If the wooing was short, the married life before them was long. They could not blame their new-made husbands, for they had only acted in obedience to their elders, and been made the unconscious instruments of evading an oath which, like a dark shadow, stood between the Benjamites and the rest of the tribes of Israel.

It was on the Plains of Shiloh that Samuel was first called by God. In the silence of night the youthful priest had laid him down to sleep in the temple of the Lord. The lamp was dimly burning before the ark, and balmy sleep was descending upon his closed eyelids, when he heard a voice gently calling, "*Samuel! Samuel!*" Leaping from his couch he ran at once to Eli,

and said, "*Here am I, for thou calledst me.*" But on Eli's assuring him he was mistaken, he lay down again to sleep. Again a low voice was heard calling, "*Samuel! Samuel!*" Again he ran to Eli and inquired, and again he was assured that he had not called him. A third time he laid down, and the third time he was called. "*Samuel! Samuel!*" was breathed in his ear in accents soft and melodious as the dying cadence of an angel's lute. For the third time he presented himself before Eli, who, perceiving that God was indeed calling the child, directed him, if called again, to answer, "*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*" For the last time Samuel lay down, his ear open to the slightest whisper, and when God again called, he answered, "*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*" Then did God reveal unto him the transgressions of the house of Eli, and his purpose toward them: how he would judge them for ever for all their vileness toward the house of Israel, and because Eli, the parent, had been remiss, and had not properly restrained his sons.

There is something in *silence* peculiarly impressive, and intimately connected with the reve-

lations of God to his servants. When Elijah fled to Mount Horeb from the face of Jezebel, a mighty whirlwind swept by: yet God was not in its rustling sound. An earthquake shook the mountain; yet God was not in its crashing thunder. A bright, volcanic glare shown forth; yet God did not manifest himself in its roaring flame. But when silence had gathered over all, then God spoke to the mantle-wrapped prophet in a still, small voice. And thus in the darkness and silence of night God spoke to Israel's future prophet, Samuel, and called him to the sacred work before him.

When David, king of Israel, felt the damps of death gathering over his brow, he called Solomon, his son and successor, and gave him his dying charge. "Moreover," said he, "thou knowest also what Joab, the son of Zeruiah, did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the host of Israel, unto Abner, the son of Ner, and unto Amasa, the son of Jethro, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on *his feet*. Do, therefore, according to thy wisdom,


and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace."

There is something thrillingly impressive, if not awful, in this dying charge of the warrior-king to his successor. Joab had been his most valiant captain. On several occasions he had saved the kingdom for his royal master, and David felt under great obligations to him. Yet the remembrance of his treachery to Abner and Amasa came up before him, and he felt that Joab had been unrequited. Hence the legacy of blood he bequeathed Solomon with the kingdom.

Adonijah having unsuccessfully attempted to usurp the crown, in which he was assisted by Joab, the latter fled to Shiloh, to the temple where the ark had been formerly kept. It was gone, but the altar remained, and, grasping its brazen horns, he vainly thought to escape the threatened doom. But no sanctuary was potent enough to shield the treacherous murderer. He was there slain—his blood flowing around the altar, and the smoke thereof ascending up a sacrifice to the God of vengeance, before the sacred place where Mercy had hitherto taber-

naced herself, and where the golden cherubim had stretched their overshadowing wings above her chosen seat.

The Plains of Shiloh have changed. Glory has put on corruption, and beauty given way to desolation. Ruin has driven her ploughshare over them, and the curse foretold by the prophets has been poured out upon them. Shiloh's fountain still flows: its waters are pure and limped as in the days of the Israelites; but the oracle of God on its banks has departed for ever. In the sides of the narrow valleys surrounding it, are many excavated tombs, now much broken away. Even the Arabs, those human vultures, shun it: and from the lights of revelation shining on the future as bright as on the past, we know that it will be ever thus. Shiloh is doomed to perpetual desolation. Yet nothing can desecrate a place once hallowed by the presence of Jehovah. In all future ages the Plains of Shiloh are *sacred*, and the brook of Shiloh a sanctified stream.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLAINS OF MOREH.

THE Plains of Moreh lie between the Plains of Shiloh on the south, and the Mountains of Samaria on the north. On the west, the Mountains of Ephraim separate them from the Plain of Sharon; and on the east, the same low ridge of barren, chalky hills stretches along which separates the Plains of Shiloh from El Ghor, the valley of the Jordan.

Standing in the centre of the Plains of Moreh, the view to the westward is singularly beautiful and picturesque. The Mountains of Ephraim stretch along like the embattled walls of an ancient castle, their dark summits cut in bold relief against the evening sky. Directly in front are Ebal and Gerizim, the mountains of blessing and cursing, like two protecting towers, Ebal being

on the north and Gerizim on the south: while between them opens out a narrow valley running like a *cul-de-sac* into the Mountains of Ephraim. This valley or dell is about a quarter of a mile wide and three miles deep; and within it, sheltered in quiet seclusion, is the ancient town of Shechem, surrounded with groves, orchards and gardens, as fresh and vigorous as though a city of yesterday, and containing a population of about eight thousand souls.

At the foot of Mount Gerizim is a well seventy-five feet deep, cut in the solid rock, the digging of which tradition assigns to the patriarch Jacob, and in honour of him it is called Jacob's well. It was here that Jesus sat down to rest while his disciples went up the valley to Shechem to purchase provisions; and here he was drawn into that most interesting and instructive conversation with the woman of Samaria, who had come to draw water from the well, and who, in the plenitude of her patriotism, insisted that Mount Gerizim, and not Jerusalem, was the proper place to worship.

There is something singularly impressive and *dramatic* in the directions given by Moses to

Joshua concerning the ceremonies to be performed when the Canaanites should be driven out. He had entreated the Lord to allow him to go over and see "the good land that was beyond Jordan, and that goodly mountain Lebanon;" but God had refused. One parting look from the summit of Pisgah was all that was vouchsafed to the great lawgiver; yet it did not hinder him from giving directions to his successor. "And it shall come to pass," said he, "when the Lord thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon Mount Gerizim, and the curse upon Mount Ebal. Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the campaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh? These shall stand upon Mount Gerizim to bless the people when ye are come over Jordan: Simeon and Levi, and Judah and Issachar, and Joseph and Benjamin. And these shall stand upon Mount Ebal to curse: Reuben, Gad and Asher, and Zebulon, Dan, and Napthali."

Such were the directions given by Moses to

his successor ; and now, Joshua, having driven the Canaanites out of the land, had assembled the Israelites on the Plains of Moreh, to follow the directions given him by his predecessor.

It must have been one of the most impressive scenes ever witnessed by the Israelites, and one calculated to make a deep and lasting impression upon their minds. In the centre, equidistant between the two mountains, stands the Ark of the Covenant. Before it is an altar, built of large, unhewn stones plastered over, and the words of the Law written upon it. On Mount Ebal are arrayed the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Napthali : small foot-paths, like steps, being cut, one above another, from the base to the top of the mountain, and the people arranged according to their tribes, one above another, and dressed in black, the Jewish symbol for cursing. On Mount Gerizim stand arrayed, from base to summit, the tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. These are all dressed in white, as the emblem of blessing. What a magnificent tableau ! The mountains rise eight hundred feet in air, *yet from base to summit a living mantle wraps*

their sides—a million human beings on either hand—Mount Gerizim a mountain of snow, Mount Ebal a mountain of ebony. Compared with this sublime assemblage, the thousands congregated in the Parthenon of Athens, or the Coliseum of Rome, sink into utter insignificance.

Joshua, having offered the required burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, now prepared to ratify the covenant. The hush of expectation had gathered over the assembled multitude. With a voice loud as a trumpet-call, Joshua, and the Levites with him, cried, "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsmen, and putteth it into a secret place." They paused : and from Mount Ebal, with a roar like the voice of many waters, came the solemn "*Amen*," from a million throats. Again Joshua and the Levites cried aloud, "Blessed shalt thou be if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee." Again they paused, and now from Mount Gerizim, in thunder tones, came the responsive "*Amen*." Again Joshua and the Levites cried

aloud, "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother." And now came the swelling "*Amen*" from Mount Ebal. Again Joshua and the Levites cried aloud, "Blessed shalt thou be if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways." And now the mighty "*Amen*" swelled up from Mount Gerizim, its million voices joining in one responsive sound.

Thus alternately propounding blessings and cursings, and receiving the responsive "*Amens*" from Mount Ebal and Gerizim, passed the day, the sun hanging low in the west ere the ceremonies were ended. As the people slowly descended into the plain, they must have felt deeply impressed with the scene just closed ; and when they lay down that night to sleep, in the dreams of night that solemn pageant must again have passed in shadowy review before them, and those responsive "*Amens*" thrilled once more on the dreaming ear of sleep.

Two hundred years after, the city of Shechem was the scene of a fearful tragedy. Gideon had been raised up as a Judge; and God, by him, ~~had~~ delivered the Israelites out of the hand of

Midian. He had judged Israel forty years, and then gone down to the grave like a shock of corn fully ripe. He had left seventy sons by his different wives, besides one named Abimelech, born of a concubine in Shechem.

Soon after Gideon's death, Abimelech conspired with the men of Shechem to usurp the regal authority; and having slain all his brethren, save one, upon a stone at Ophra, he had now met the men of Shechem by the Plain of the Pillar, between Ebal and Gerizim, to be anointed king.

Already had the crown been placed upon his head, and the kingly feast prepared, when, lo, on Mount Gerizim, appeared Jotham, one of the sons of Gideon, whom Abimelech had vainly supposed was slain. Lifting up his voice he cried unto them, "Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you." He then spoke a parable unto them: how the trees of the field wished to anoint a king over them; but the olive, the fig, and the vine successively refused the proffered honour. At last they called upon the bramble to reign over them: which accepting the trust, a fire came out of it and devoured the cedars of Lebanon.

After prophesying the future controversy between the men of Shechem and Abimelech, he ran away and fled to Beer for fear of his brother, and dwelt there till the prophecy was fulfilled. An evil spirit arose between the men of Shechem and Abimelech. He overthrew the city and sowed it with salt, burnt the tower, and slew the people that were therein. Yet vengeance suffered him not long to survive the ruin of his native city. A woman flung a piece of millstone upon the fratricide's head at Thebes, and he, to avoid the disgrace of being slain by a woman, was fain to call upon his armour-bearer to thrust him through, that he might escape the ineffable disgrace of being slain by a woman's hand.

After passing through Shechem, and along the valley between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim we come to a broad, circular basin, five or six miles in diameter, bounded on every side by mountains. From the plain of this beautiful amphitheatre of mountains, near the western side, rises a very high hill, with almost perpendicular sides, on which stood Samaria, commanding a position of impregnable strength and surpassing loveliness. This was one of the Plains

of Moreh, though sometimes called the Plain of Samaria, from the city on its bosom.

The Syrians had invaded Judea and laid siege to Samaria; and so straitened were the inhabitants for provisions, that they were reduced to the direst extremities. Already had mothers slain their children, and, cannibal-like, devoured them in the extremity of famine. Even the king was astounded. He rent his clothes, and exposed the sackcloth upon his flesh. Yet, tracing all the evils that had befallen him to a wrong source, he had sent a messenger to slay Elisha the prophet, to whom he attributed the disasters overwhelming him—as if the slaughter of God's chosen servant would turn away the wrath of his Maker from him.

The prophet Elisha was sitting in his house, with the elders around him, as the messenger approached. “*See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away my head?*” Look where the messenger cometh. Shut the door, and hold him fast at the door; is not his master's foot behind him?” said Elisha unto the elders; and no sooner had the messenger come down, than the king also appeared. Then it was that Elisha

declared to the haughty monarch that God would, on the morrow, make provisions so cheap that a measure of fine flour should be sold for a shekel, and that, too, in the gate of Samaria.

This prophecy of Elisha seemed so utterly incredible and impossible to those who heard it, that a certain lord on whose hand the king leaned was induced to answer, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven might this thing be!" To which Elisha replied, "Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof."

The shades of night have gathered over Samaria, and the storm of battle pauses on the surrounding plains. The wakeful sentinels are at their posts, and along the walls, every half-hour, gleams the torch of the night-patrol. Over against them burn the watch-fires of the surrounding Syrians on the plains below. It is midnight, and sleep has sealed the eyes of the besiegers with her downy signet. A band of sentinels are, however, awake, sitting round the watch-fires, and recounting to each other the exploits of other days. Soldiers love to recount *the past*, and speculate on the chances of the

present. Many an illustrious deed of arms has shone in the reflected glare of the watch-fire, that never found the page of history ; and many a battle has been won and city captured that passed away in its ascending smoke.

The sentinels are now discussing the fate of Samaria. The dreadful famine devouring the inhabitants is no secret. In a few days, at most, the city must fall, and then, what spoil ! But hark ! A distant sound is heard as of armed men marching. It seems to come from the beleaguered city. With nervous shake and hurried words they arouse the night-watch to repel the coming attack. "The Samaritans are coming out of the city to make a night sortie." The sound increases. Over the Mountains of Ephraim, away to the northward, an army is approaching. How plainly they can hear the tramp of marching footmen ! Horses are neighing to each other, and the clashing of shields is borne on the wings of the night-blast. The night-watch rush through the camp and rouse the sleeping soldiers. "Up ! up ! Arm ! arm ! the Hittites are upon us !" The whole camp is astir. Warriors hurry on their clothes and

snatch their arms. The horsemen bridle their steeds, and, grasping their spears, leap upon their backs. But hark! From the southward, by the way of Shechem, another army is approaching. The wheels of innumerable chariots rumble along the stony road. Horsemen shout to each other—shields clash against shields, and the heavy tramp of countless footmen is mixed with the rustling of banners and the click of unsheathing swords. "*The Egyptians are hired against us!*" shriek the Syrians one to another, as, rushing out, they flee toward Damascus. In the hurry of flight, all impediments are flung away. The horsemen leap from their horses, and leave them behind, in their eagerness to escape. Arms—vessels—garments—all are thrown away; yet behind them still thunders that mighty host. The Hittites, Egyptians, and Samaritans have mingled together, and press them closer and closer; arrows whiz past them unseen; and flying spears hiss along the air: nor does the pursuit relax till the dawning light trembles along the crest of Mount Gilead, and the morning day-star quivers in the depths of Jordan.

But in the beleaguered city all is silent. The

Syrian watch-fires have one by one expired. At the gate of Samaria sits a group of bloated forms, chewing bits of leather in the extremity of famine. They are four lepers, who, incapable of bearing arms, have been thrust out of the city to die. As they recount to each other their pitiable condition, they finally conclude to throw themselves upon the mercy of the besiegers. They can be only slain : and death by the sword is better than death by famine. As the morning light slowly dawns, they cautiously approach the Syrian camp ; but no one is there. Entering a tent, their first search is for food. Having gorged themselves almost to bursting, their next thought is for plunder. They gather silver, and gold, and raiment together, and go and hide it. Another tent is next rifled and its treasures hid ; but, fearful some mischief will yet happen to them, with the brightening daylight they return unto the city, and inform the porter having charge of the gate, who reports it forthwith in the city.

The king, thinking it only a plot of the Syrians to draw them away from the city in the *hope of appeasing their hunger*, restrains the



people from going out till the horsemen have been despatched to examine the camp. They ride as far as Jordan, and lo, the way is filled with garments and vessels thrown away by the fleeing Syrians. The people go out and spoil the camp ; and ere night again curtains the city, a measure of fine flour is sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel. The unbelieving lord who thought the miracle impossible unless God should open windows in heaven, is appointed to have charge of the gate. The people throng upon him. He is thrown down, trodden under foot, and dies. His eyes behold the sudden plenty, but his lips taste not the sweetness thereof.

The Plains of Moreh were the favourite residence of the prophet Elijah. Like an angel clothed in the garments of mortality, this extraordinary personage is abruptly introduced to our notice in the reign of the wicked Ahab. In the midst of a corrupt generation, he suddenly appears of stern and awful sanctity, like a messenger from heaven let down from that fiery chariot, by which, when his mission is ended, he *is* conveyed back to heaven without tasting

death. He has announced to Ahab the approaching famine. For three years neither dew nor rain shall descend upon the land of Israel. He has turned eastward, and hidden himself on the banks of the brook Cherith. The twilight of uncertainty has gathered over the exact locality of this sacred stream ; but it is generally supposed to be the brook east of Samaria, and running across the Plains of Moreh through the cliffs skirting its eastern boundaries, whence, rushing down the slopes of El Ghor, it falls into the bosom of the turbulent Jordan.

There, away from his fellow-men, dwelt the leathern-girdled prophet, his mantle wrapped about him by night, and his days spent in prayer. Morning and evening the hovering ravens alight at his feet and bring him bread and meat, while for drink he quaffs the waters of the brook. How strangely familiar must the countenances of those winged messengers have become unto him, as night and morn he receives their proffered gifts ! Whence did they obtain their supplies ? God only knows. Perchance the bread was a garnered remnant of that manna *which, for forty years, had nourished the Israel-*

ites in the wilderness ; and the flesh a reserved portion of those quails sent by God when they lusted for flesh.

Here dwelt the prophet until a whole year had passed away. Day by day the scorching sun flamed up the heavens from the brow of Mount Gilead, and sunk at night in a lurid blaze beyond the Mountains of Ephraim. The heavens were indeed brass, and the earth iron. The dews descended not by night, or the rains by day. If, perchance, a stray cloud drifted over the face of the burning sun, its molten wings had no cooling shadow to the earth beneath. The grass gradually withered away, and the brook dried up. At last, Elijah was sent to Marepeth, where, in the house of a widow woman, the handful of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, until the days were accomplished foretold by the prophet, that the Lord would send rain upon the earth.

The Plains of Moreh still exist in all their beauty—unchanged by nature—unwasted by time. Mounts Gerizim and Ebal still frown upon each other ; but no Israelites whiten the *sides* of Gerizim, or darken those of Ebal ; yet

tradition still hallows Mount Gerizim, and a little remnant of Samaritans still go up to worship God on its summit, as did their fathers in the days of our Saviour. Shechem flourishes, but Samaria is no more. Jacob's field was beside his well, and the piece of ground he gave to his son Joseph, whose sepulchre is there to this day. The brook Cherith still glides along, but no raven-fed prophet wanders upon its banks, and drinks of its gurgling stream. Yet, change as they may, the glorious associations of the past shed their hallowed beams upon the Plains of Moreh, and they are *sacred* for ever.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLAIN OF DURA.

THE Plain of Dura is situated in the province of Babylon. In the changes of time it is difficult to give its precise boundaries ; yet from the best information we can obtain, it was bounded on the north and east by the River Chebar, and on the south and west by the Euphrates. It probably extended northward as far as the range of mountains separating Assyria from Armenia.

Again the children of Israel had rebelled—forgotten once more the Lord of hosts who had brought them out of the land of Egypt—forgotten the many punishments God had inflicted on them from time to time as they rebelled against him—until, at last, a grievous punishment had overtaken them. Zion was desolate ; Jerusalem in *heaps* ; the people led captive ; and last, worst

of all, the holy temple profaned, its Holy of Holies defiled, and its sacred vessels carried away by the king of Babylon. Well, indeed, might the captives sit down in despair by the Rivers of Babylon, and weep when they remembered Zion. For those that wasted them required of them mirth, and to hear one of their native songs, even one of the sacred songs of Zion. With what intense earnestness did the weeping captives exclaim, as they hung their harps on the willows fringing the streams, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." How often do the children of men, like the Israelites of old, forget the glorious Giver, and turn with tearful eyes and willow-hung harps to the remembrance of departed gifts.

The prophet Jeremiah had been permitted to remain in Jerusalem, and how exquisitely touching are the lamentations he pours out over the ruined city! "The city did indeed sit solitary that was full of people. The beauty of the daughter of Zion had departed. The Lord had

covered her with a cloud in his anger. The gold had become dim—the fine gold changed. The stones of the sanctuary had been poured out in the top of every street, and the joy of the whole earth was desolate.” Most truly might the venerable prophet wish his head were waters, and his eyes a fountain of tears, that he might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of his people. Grievous and heavy to be borne, both to the captives taken away and to the Jews remaining, was the Babylonish captivity.

Among the captives carried by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon, was the youthful prophet Ezekiel. For seven long, weary years had he groaned with the rest of his brethren in bondage. God however appears unto him while wandering on the banks of the River Chebar, and how magnificently sublime was the appearance of Jehovah unto him. We can faintly imagine the gorgeous vision that unfolded itself to his sight, from the record he has left us. Behind him, far down the river, was the mighty Babylon, with its lofty walls and countless inhabitants; around him was a vast plain—on his right hand the flowing *Chebar*. Far to the left, in the blue distance,

the giant Euphrates, like a pilgrim monarch, rolled his dark waters along. Northward, the tall Mountains of Armenia meet the sky, and gleam in the cold moonlight that quivers on their peaks. The stars are out in their beauty, and many a Chaldean shepherd is gazing on the glittering orbs, and shaping them by fancy into constellations. The prophet is alone. The one bitter thought is in his heart, and the one mournful scene before him: the captivity of Zion, and the destruction of the Holy City. We can almost hear his earnest supplications to the Lord God of hosts that he will once more loose the bands of the daughter of Zion, and turn again her captivity like streams of the south. While he yet wrestles, like the ancient patriarch, for the blessing upon his people, lo! a mighty rustling is heard, like the flutter of unnumbered wings, and far to the northward a dreadful whirlwind is approaching. As it rushes on with thunder crash and deafening roar, a great cloud covers the sky. The stars are blotted out; the moon eushrouded; and thick darkness folds her sable wing over earth and heaven. As the prophet, with trembling heart and quaking

limbs, pours out his supplications with increased fervour, not only for Israel but also for himself, that God will preserve him alive for his mercy's sake, lo ! the thick darkness unrolls itself like a parting scroll—the heavens are opened, and a burning throne appears—a rainbow of fire encircles it, and one is sitting upon a throne, even He, the Ancient of Days. From his loins upward is as the appearance of a man ; and from his loins even downward, as the appearance of fire, and brightness round about. Beneath are four living cherubim, with each four faces and four wings, and wheels full of eyes accompanying them. Like a flash of lightning did they execute the behests of the Spirit, turning neither to the right nor left. Well might the prophet fall upon his face at this sublime appearance of the glory of the Lord. It was indeed dreadful to behold ; and nothing but the Spirit entering into him, and setting him upon his feet, could have sustained him in that awful hour. Terrible was the appearance of Jehovah unto his servant ; and, as the seal of his commission, a hand is put forth unto him, bearing a roll written within and *without* with lamentation, and mourning, and

woe. God then instructs him what he shall say to his rebellious brethren, and in the glorious visions of light unfolds the mighty changes and fast-coming events of the future.

But the Plain of Dura was destined to another greater and more striking demonstration of Jehovah's power. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, having made an image of gold, three-score cubits in height and six in breadth, which he had erected in the plain, was anxious to dedicate the same. Accordingly he issued his royal edict, summoning all kingdoms, tongues, and people to meet him on the Plain of Dura, to assist in the dedication of the golden image he had erected.

We can imagine the consternation with which the royal edict was received by the captive Israelites. Far from the hill of Zion—captives in a strange land—commanded under the penalty of an excruciating death to worship a golden idol. Those in particular who had been promoted to places of honour and trust, were brought into a great strait. God had given them grace in the eyes of their captors. They had been elevated to *posts of honour*. Would it not seem an act of

black ingratitude as well as impiety thus to disregard the king's command! And then the penalty—a burning, fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar seems to have had an idea that all would not willingly worship the idol he had erected. Hence the furnace he had prepared to melt away all the scruples of unbelievers. Alas! his example is only one in the great volume of human bigotry and religious intolerance which the past affords. Jews have persecuted Christians; Christians, Jews; and millions of Christians have put off the garment of mortality in the devouring flame kindled by the hands of their persecuting brethren.

Morn waves her roseate banner along the eastern hills, and all Babylon is astir. It is the great day of worship and dedication of the golden image. So vast is the multitude of worshippers, no building is capable of containing them. On the beautiful plain of Dura the mighty idol towers aloft, its golden head reflecting the first beams of coming day. The whole plain is alive with the thousands and tens of thousands of eager worshippers. The morning mists curl upward from the dark line of the rolling Euphrates, and the willows on its banks hang their drooping heads, wet

with the dews of night. The grass sparkles with dew, and the breath of morn comes laden with the scent of a thousand flowers. Onward sweeps that mighty tide of worshippers—the musicians destined to commence the overture, and mark with their notes the meed of worship, tuning their instruments, or playing fitful snatches of the grand orchestra. The sun rides high in heaven ere all that mighty congregation has arrayed itself for the solemn pageant. But at last all is completed. And now a long flourish of trumpets, followed by the deep and solemn strains of unnumbered instruments, bursts upon the ear: and, as the swelling strain peals forth in one loud roll of choral symphony, the blind idolaters kneel down and worship that golden idol.

Yet all have not bowed the knee to that graven image. Methinks I see the sons of Israel standing in mournful groups in the outer circle of worshippers—some of them kneeling with the idolatrous multitude, while others bend forward, half standing, half kneeling, fit types of their bending faith. But many yet remember Zion, and the seven thousand in Israel who refused to *bend the knee to Baal* in the days of the prophet

Elijah; and with prayers to God in their hearts, they boldly resolve to brave the peril, and stand steadfast in the faith of their fathers.

Among these, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, as men high in authority, occupy the front rank. Not only do they refuse to kneel themselves, but endeavour to prevent their brethren from joining the idolatrous mass. How soon was Nebuchadnezzar informed of the glaring act of disobedience, and how prompt was he to summon them before him. "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, that ye do not serve my gods, or worship the golden image which I have set up?" With what noble frankness do they answer, "The God we serve is able to deliver us out of thy hand; but if *not*—if he requires us to yield up our lives for his cause—we are resigned to his will; either way, we refuse to serve thy gods, or worship the golden image thou hast set up!" The haughty king was enraged. Speechless with fury, the form of his visage was changed against them, and he commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than it was wont to be heated.

Some heat the furnace with all manner of

inflammable materials, while others bind the doomed Israelites, and drag them to its flaming mouth. A blast of wind drives the streaming flames on one side, and the king's command being urgent, the executioners advance to the very edge of the furnace, and thrust in their victims. Quick as a lightning flash the eddying wind sweeps round, and like serpents' tongues the leaping flames fasten upon them. Blinded with smoke, their hair singed and clothes on fire, some stagger forward and fall into the furnace, others fall upon the ground and perish. Of all those mighty men who essayed to execute the king's command, not one escaped.

It must have been a thrilling moment to every one in that vast host; and various were the emotions that swept over each bosom as the murderous tragedy drew to a close. The business of the day was suspended, and the golden image forgotten. It was now a contest between the God of Israel and Nebuchadnezzar. What earnest prayers went up from the captive brethren, that God would make bare his arm, as in the days of old, for their deliverance; and what *shrieks of agony* burst forth as they saw the

captives thrown, all bound and helpless, into the very midst of the fiery furnace!

Jehovah has triumphed. In the midst of that raging flame walk the three holy Israelites, praising God for his mercy unto them. The ropes which bound them have dropped off—turned to ashes by the devouring flame; and as they walk backward and forward, another is with them—even He who, six centuries afterward, walked at midnight on the tempest-tossed Sea of Galilee. Even the king saw him, and summoning his counsellors, inquired if he did not cast three men bound into the furnace. The scene was so strange and unexpected that he could hardly credit the evidence of his own senses; and when they answered in the affirmative, he exclaimed, "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

Having called them out of the fire, the captains, and princes, and counsellors, and governors, gathered around them, to see what effect the fire had on them. Behold, not even a hair of their heads was singed, and the smell of fire had not even reached upon their garments. The revulsion of

feeling was complete in their favour; and Nebuchadnezzar not only promoted them higher in office, but he made a decree that no one should speak a word against the God of Israel under penalty of being cut to pieces, and his house made a dunghill.

With what grateful hearts did the Israelites return home that evening from the dedication of the golden idol! Though captives in a strange land, their God was yet near them, and had once more confounded their enemies. As that vast multitude went home, nothing was talked about but the events of the day, and the power of Israel's God. The image was forgotten; and when night again drew her curtains round her couch, many a knee was bent, and many a prayer went up to the Lord of hosts from knees that never bent before, and tongues that never syllabled his hallowed name.

Ten years have passed away, and the Plain of Dura is the scene of another demonstration of Jehovah's power. It is a beautiful morning in spring. The gentle rains and warm sunshine have caused the tender grass to shoot up, and the forest trees to put forth their leaves. The

flowers of spring are opening their petals, and the time for the singing of birds has come. The shepherds and herdsmen of Chaldea have driven their flocks of sheep and herds of cattle down upon the Plain, and, wrapped in their ample cloaks, they silently stand watching each his separate charge.

In one of those herds of cattle we distinguish a human form. The herd seem to recognize it as one with which they have been long familiar and quietly graze beside it as a well-known acquaintance. As we look closer we see the matted beard and hair looking like eagles feathers, and the long nails that resemble birds claws. The stupid stare and drivelling action of the poor idiot-like wretch before us, tell us that we are gazing upon the features of a confirmed lunatic. Yet, *mirabile dictu—mirabil visu!* the poor gibbering wretch before us was once the great Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon and lord of the whole earth.

O Lucifer, son of the morning, how art thou fallen from thy high estate! On the very plain where thou art grazing—eating grass like the oxen surrounding thee—once towered aloft th

golden image, and at thy royal command thousands knelt in reverence before it. Alas! how art thou changed! Where are now thy princes, and captains, and governors, and judges, and reasurers, and counsellors, and sheriffs, and rulers of provinces? Is this the great Babylon which thou hast built by the might of thy power and for the honour of thy glorious majesty? Yet seest thou not at times in the darkened chambers of thy imagery, a watcher and a holy one coming down from heaven, to hew down a lofty tree whose top reaches on high, in whose branches the birds build their nests, and under whose shadow the beasts of the field find shelter? Is there no shadow stealing over thy troubled brain of a band of iron and brass in the roots of the prostrate tree, wet with the dews of heaven until seven times have passed away? Alas! thou art dumb!—silent as thy four-footed companions that look with compassion upon thee!

It must have been a memorable time in Chaldea when the shadow of that mental eclipse slowly passed away, and the sun of reason once more shone in upon the darkened mind of Nebuchadnezzar. For seven years the king had

herded with the beasts, not a single ray of intelligence illuminating his ox-like countenance. At first he probably looked up. The glorious sun, shining in all the beneficent majesty of light, would be the first object of notice. As reason brightened, other objects would next attract his attention—the cattle surrounding him—the keeper watching them—the distant city with its lofty walls and brazen gates. Dim recollections of long-forgotten scenes and events would next flit over his mind, like moonlight over a troubled sea ; then a clear, settled conviction that he was indeed a something ; entirely different from the animals surrounding him. But what ? Wherefore was he there ? It would indeed be a study worthy of a mental philosopher to trace the effects on the senses produced by the gradual dawn of reason on a mind long darkened by insanity. In the present instance, Nebuchadnezzar “lifted up his eyes unto heaven, and his understanding returned unto him ; and he blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation.”

We can picture the commotion in Babylon when those bearing rule therein were first informed of the returning sanity of Nebuchadnezzar. At first they were incredulous. He had been so long a maniac that it seemed impossible he should ever again be restored to reason. As the conviction strengthened that he was indeed himself, fear took the place of incredulity. Would the king forgive their desertion, and the indignity of thrusting him out to herd with the beasts of the field? Each one thought it best to make his separate court to the returning king, and throw the blame on his absent peers. Thus, one by one, his lords and counsellors sought unto him, each man striving which should be the first to tender his services.

The lesson was not lost on Nebuchadnezzar. Excellent majesty was added to his other kingly qualifications, and for the remainder of his life he praised and extolled the King of heaven, whose ways he had indeed found to be ways of judgment, and that those walking in pride God was able to abase.

The Plain of Dura still smiles in beauty, its bosom covered with the richest verdure. The

morning light and the evening shadows steal over it as soft and beautiful as they did twenty-five centuries ago. The dark Euphrates still wanders onward, like a pilgrim monarch surveying the mighty ruins of his deserted empire. The willows on his banks are the successors of those on which the captive Israelites hung their harp. But Babylon—the mighty—the Lady of kingdoms—the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency—where is she? Gone down to darkness and the worm! Her palaces are dust—her streets long lines of heaps. "The cormorant and the bittern possess it; the owl and the raven dwell there. He hath stretched out upon it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness. Thorns have come up in her palaces—nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof; it is a habitation for dragons, and a court for owls. The wild beasts of the desert meet there; the saytr cries unto his fellow. There the great owl makes her nest, and vultures gather together. They shall possess it for ever, from generation to generation, and none shall molest them or make them afraid, saith the Lord of hosts."

Hallowed by the presence of Jehovah, a per-

petual memento to all coming time of the sure word of prophecy, the Plain of Dura may well claim the title of *sacred*.

CHAPTER X.

THE PLAIN OF ESDRAELON.

BETWEEN the mountains of Samaria on the south, and the hills of Galilee on the north, lies a magnificent tract of table-land, called the Plain of Esdraelon, or, as it is more familiarly known in the history of Palestine, THE GREAT PLAIN. The blue Mediterranean washes it on the west, its silver waves sweeping round the northern base of Mount Carmel, and forming the Bay of Acre; while on the east, the three parallel mountains, Tabor, Little Hermon, and Gilboa, separate it from El Ghor, the valley of the Jordan.

The view from the centre of this Plain is in the highest degree beautiful and picturesque. On the north lies Nazareth, the Saviour's early home. Round it, swelling up in knolls of matchless green, the hills of Galilee stretch away to the base of

Mount Lebanon, and, climbing his rocky sides, seem to hang a wreath of laurel round his snowy scalp. North-east, the Great Hermon shoots up beyond its brethren—a mountain among mountains—its head wrapped in perpetual clouds, through which the glittering snows occasionally shine forth, like the white raiment glistening in the glorious transfiguration which took place there. Well might Peter and they that were with him be heavy with sleep. The cold on its summit is so intense that few travellers visit it.

On the east, Mount Tabor rears its cone-like form, covered with foliage from base to apex; while westward, Carmel sits in all its “excellency,” the waters of the blue Mediterranean playing round and washing its dusty feet.

The history of the Plain of Esdraelon is brief yet sad. From time immemorial it has been the gathering-place of armies. The clouds of battle have swept over it from age to age. On its green, placid bosom, now impearled with the evening dew, the warriors of every nation under heaven have fought, bled, and died; their tents have whitened every hillock, their banners floated in every breeze. Here Persians, Arabs, Jews, Gen-

tiles, Saracens, Turks, Druses, English, French, Germans, and Languedocians, have met in the shock of battle, and cloven each other down. Their blood has flowed together—their ashes have mixed, and millions of slain warriors have here found a common grave.

To the eye of fancy there might almost seem a poetic analogy between the Plain before us and the dying blessing of the patriarch Jacob: "Issachar is a strong ass, couching down between two burthens." In the distribution of the land of Canaan by Joshua, this Plain, "couching down" between two mountains, fell to the lot of Issachar; and here that tribe dwelt till carried away by Nebuchadnezzar in the Babylonish captivity.

Three thousand two hundred and fifty years ago, the same bright sun was shining that now rolls before us in all the beneficent majesty of light. On the summit of Mount Tabor stands Barak, the captain of the Israelite host. Beside him is Deborah, the prophetess, whose house is on Mount Ephraim, between Ramah and Bethel, beneath the shadow of an umbrageous palm. Around them are ten thousand chosen warriors of Israel, gathered together to fight with Sisera,

the captain of the host of Jabin, king of Canaan, who had ruled over and mightily oppressed the Israelites for twenty years.

On the Plain of Esdraelon, by the side of the River Kishon, is arrayed the army of Sisera. Nine hundred chariots of war are placed in the van; from the ends of the axles project long, sweeping scythes, and midway on the spokes are fastened those long double-edged knives, set at an angle so as to cut perpendicularly with the revolving wheels. The horses are barbed, a lance projecting from the breast of each one yoked to the chariots. A score or more of fighting men occupy each chariot, including the driver. Behind them are drawn up the footmen in a long line, ready to advance when the chariots have driven through the ranks of the enemy; and on each wing of the host is a body of horsemen, ready to scour the plain and sabre the fugitives as soon as the ranks are broken.

According to the number of chariots, Sisera must have had at least one hundred and twenty thousand men; for the ancients always allowed one hundred men, or more, to each chariot.

It must have been an appalling sight to the

Israelites encamped on Mount Tabor, as that mighty host put itself in array—the sun flashing on the glittering scythes and knives of the chariots—the banners wantoning in the wind—the horses pawing the earth with impatience, their necks clothed with thunder. Nothing could have sustained their courage but the confident predictions of the prophetess that the Lord had gone down before them, and would that day deliver the host of Sisera into their hand. The particulars of the battle we know not; they are hidden in the dark tabernacle of the past. Barak went down with his ten thousand followers and encountered the enemy on the Plain. We can imagine the slingers of Israel selecting the chariot-drivers out and smiting them in their foreheads as David did Goliath—the driverless chariots rushing against each other, or wheeling round and cutting swaths through the supporting footmen. The army of Sisera was put to flight. Some endeavoured to escape over the Kishon, but in vain. Thousands were drowned, and the river was almost choked with dead bodies. Others tried to escape by flight, but the light-armed Israelites were too nimble for them.

"Even the stars in in their courses fought against Sisera," as Deborah sung after the battle: for Sirius and Procyon, the Dog Stars, were on the meridian, and their baneful influence was felt. The day was hot and suffocating, and hundreds were smothered in their armour.

Not one of all that mighty host escaped. Even Sisera himself, though he fled from the battle, was afterwards slain. A nail was driven into his temples by Jael, Heber's wife, in whose tent he had sought refuge from the pursuing enemy.

Twenty centuries have passed away, and other armies are encamped on the Plain of Esdraelon. A mighty change has passed over the world. The Messiah has appeared, executed his mission, been crucified, and ascended into heaven. Jerusalem has been trodden down and again rebuilt. The mosque of Omar now rears its thousand minarets on the very place where the temple stood. Over all the known habitable globe the children of Israel are scattered, like the leaves of autumn before the blasts of winter. The pure and holy lights of Christianity are shining in the *distant west*. Mount Calvary has supplanted

Mount Zion, and the wood of the true cross is accounted of more value than Solomon's temple in its palmy days.

Another religion has also arisen. Mahomet, the crafty Arabian impostor, has succeeded in forcing the doctrine of the Koran upon the eastern world, and the sons of Ishmael have unfurled the crescent, and under its waxing horns have for centuries waged an exterminating warfare against the disciples of the cross. The tide of battle, which at one time flowed west as far as the Pillars of Hercules, has been rolled back, and now, on the Plain of Esdraelon, the armies of the east and the west—the cross and the crescent—are pitted against each other.

There is something wonderfully romantic in the history of the different crusades. They occupy the middle ground between romance and history. For two centuries the armies of Europe sought the plains of Asia Minor; and incredible are the tales told of the military prowess and exploits of those martial pilgrims in their efforts to redeem the sepulchre of Christ. In the silent chancels of Westminster Abbey, that great *national* mausoleum,

Within whose shadowy aisles
England's great dead repose,
Where brazen urns, and marble piles,
Their ashes safe enclose,

he first objects of antiquity that greet the eye, are the mouldering cenotaphs of those crusading warriors—their arms crossed upon their breasts in memory of their vows, their knees bent as if in prayer, and the crests above their helmets emblazoned with a cross. In Pere-la-Chaise, the national cemetery of sunny France, those doughty champions occupy a prominent position. There, horses prance, banners wave, and lances couch—hiselled out of the silent marble by the hand of genius, as memorials of many a gallant knight whose bones now lie mouldering, unblessed and dishonoured, on Palestine's shore.

On the Plain of Esdraelon the chivalry of Europe are encamped. The flower of English knighthood is there, led by Richard Cœur de lion himself. Allied with them are the chivalry of France, of Germany, of Flanders, of Burgundy, and of Italy: the first led by Philip Augustus, a able and experienced general, second only to Richard, and the last by the famous Jacques

d'Avesnes. The scene was in the highest degree magnificent and superb. Thousands of banners waving in the wind ; the glittering arms of the mailed knights ; their fluttering pennons and painted shields, emblazoned with all the mystical devices of heraldry ; the embroidered banners of the barons, their magnificent coats-of-arms, and waving mantles ; the gorgeous robes of the Latin priests, carrying crucifixes in their hands ; the animated multitude of cross-bowmen and men-at-arms, sheathed in complete panoply—these, with countless tents glittering on the plain, and thousands of war-horses decked in gorgeous furniture, all spread out in the unclouded brightness of an eastern sky, formed as magnificent a scene as the human eye could well look upon.

On the inland hills of Galilee were encamped the millions of Saladin, in all the pomp of eastern luxury. One huge black banner, from the tent of Saladin himself, floated over the host, like the wing of the night-raven hovering over the field of the slain ; and beside it were banners of green, blue, pink, and yellow, and arms as bright and diversified as the different nations whose congregated thousands followed him to battle.

The city of Acre had been long besieged, and famine was now beginning to pinch with gripping hand its defenders. The English fleet in the Bay of Acre, and the triple line of besieging crusaders, prevented any supplies from reaching it, and seemed to gird it as with a band of iron. Saladin had raised this vast host to relieve the city, and drive the invading Christians into the sea : and fierce and incessant were the attempts made by him to accomplish his object. Thousands and tens of thousands of light-armed horsemen would rush down upon the crusading army, mounted on steeds swift as the wind, clad in glittering steel, and armed with bows of horn. These fiery horsemen, making the earth tremble and smoke as they thundered along, would rush upon the camp as though ready to trample the besiegers down under the hoofs of their mettled chargers. But the Christians received them every where with the most chivalric ardour. Dropping the points of their long lances, they hurled back the Moslems with that decisive charge which, like the fall of a mountain, crushed every thing before it. Often would a dozen *Christian lances* charge and put to flight a hun-

dred of the infidels. King Richard himself seems to have delighted in those daily encounters, and, like a knight-errant of the olden time, sought adventures with his single lance. Though unsuccessful as a general in his efforts to redeem Palestine from the hand of the Moslem, he nevertheless acquired in his own person a reputation for military prowess that ages have been unable to dim.

Thus day by day, and week by week, raged the battle on the Plain of Esdraelon: the horsemen of Saladin wheeling like hawks round the Christian host, and swooping up all stragglers: the crusaders beating back their numerous attacks, and pressing the besieged city closer and closer. At last Acre fell, and the banner of the cross waved in triumph over the vanquished city. A treaty was made with Saladin, and many a mailed knight and proud baron laid aside his glittering hauberk and plumed helmet to don a palmer's cloak and monk's cowl, and go as pilgrims to those sacred shrines once consecrated by the footsteps of God's holy angels, and hallowed by the presence of the Son of God.

A thousand years have passed away, and the

storm of battle has again descended on the Plain of Esdraelon. Not that peace, during this millennial cycle, waved her halcyon sceptre over it ; far otherwise. The blood of innumerable battles and petty skirmishes incarnadined its bosom ; but in this brief sketch I can only touch the most prominent events which, like mountain summits, rise along the horizon of history.

Napoleon Bonaparte, having invaded Palestine, laid siege to Acre. He had passed from Egypt along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, across the Plain of Sharon, round the base of Mount Carmel, and was now encamped before Acre. Sir Sidney Smith, an English captain, in command of a squadron of two ships of the line and several smaller vessels, had anchored in the bay, and thrown himself with all his spare mariners into the town. The fortifications of Acre, though much dilapidated, were yet susceptible of defence ; and Sir Sidney, having captured the French flotilla as it crept round the headland of Mount Carmel, had transferred the whole battering train, amounting to forty-four guns, to the walls of Acre. The Turks under Achmet, surnamed the Butcher, were full

of enthusiasm ; but their martial spirit would have availed them little against a general of Napoleon's experience and military skill, had they been left alone to conduct the defence. But Colonel Philippeaux, an accomplished French engineer, and a partisan of the Bourbons, was there to assist them with his military skill.

In vain Napoleon pressed the siege of Acre. For ten days he had kept up an almost incessant rain of iron upon the walls. As they sunk beneath the pitiless blast, the besieged raised new ones inside the ruins, and the storming parties of the French were beaten back in every attempt. It was one incessant cannonade, both by night and by day—the thunder of the besiegers finding an echo from the walls of the beleaguered city.

The Turks, however, were not idle. By vast exertions, an enormous army was raised in Damascus, Aleppo, and Syria, to march to the relief of Acre. The Bedouins of the desert, and scattered Mamelukes, were pressed into its ranks, to overwhelm by numbers their bold antagonist, to whom they gave the appellation of Sultan Kebir, or King of Fire, from the sheets of flame *bursting* from the French ranks.

With that wonderful promptitude for which Napoleon was through life distinguished, he waited not to be attacked ; but, leaving two thousand men to guard the trenches before Acre, despatched three thousand, under Kleber, across the plain toward Jordan, and soon after followed himself with three thousand more.

The sun was just rising over the hills of Palestine, with the glorious suddenness of an eastern morn, as Kleber, with his little band, debouched from a narrow valley near the base of Mount Tabor, and formed upon the plain. He had marched the preceding day from Nazareth along the hills of Galilee, and was not aware of the fearful proximity of the Turkish host. Banners, and plumes, and turbans, and glittering steel, flashing in the level beams of the rising sun, were suddenly spread before him. He had only time to throw his little band into one of Napoleon's impregnable squares, with the cannon at the angles, when the Turkish army of fifteen thousand footmen and twelve thousand horsemen rushed upon them. A loud shout burst from their ranks as the Turkish horsemen thundered on their victims, and with gleaming sabres and unslung carbines they

Artillery brought to sweep them away in moment.

But thick and fast flashed the volleys from living citadel. The three first ranks formed impregnable *chevaux-de-frise* with their bayoneted rifles over their shoulders their comrades fired one continuous volley. Down went horse and rider in one promiscuous heap. Like a miscreant girding his prey did those fearless heroes gallop round and round that square, striving to find an entrance, yet repulsed on every side.

It was noon when Bonaparte arrived on heights overlooking the field of battle. A column of smoke hid the combatants below; through the *den* canopy, Napoleon could observe his own troops stand by the steady flash of light emitted from their ranks. Rushing down to their rescue, he formed his band into squares, forming with Kieber's a triangle in among the Turks. All was now horrible confusion and carnage in the field. The Turkish horse and artillery were driven in upon each other in wild confusion. Murat, with his splendid cavalry, charged into the swollen tide of turbans and flashing cimeters, and like a lion

amid his prey. The victory was complete; and as the sun slowly sunk beyond the western wave, that mighty army was no more. Twenty-seven thousand Turks had been routed and put to flight by an army of six thousand Frenchmen.

The siege of Acre was now pressed with renewed vigour. Day by day and night by night the horrible slaughter continued. The walls were reduced to a pile of blackened ruins—the streets ploughed with bombshells, and houses demolished. In the sulphurous cloud of smoke, enveloping besiegers and besieged like a funeral pall blackened forms would rush upon each other with dripping bayonets and bloody cimeters. The cannon thundered on in one incessant roar. Mines were burrowed under the walls, and hundreds of barrels of gunpowder exploded. Like demons filled with hellish fury, did the French soldiers rush to the onset, and like demons were they hurled back by the bloody and ferocious Turks.

The siege had been continued for sixty days and half the besiegers were dead or wounded. To the horrors of war the plague was added. *Hundreds of* unburied corpses, festering and

putrefying in the burning sun, tainted the air. At last, a fleet of thirty sail of the line was seen approaching, with a reinforcement of twelve thousand English and Turks. The hopes of Napoleon sunk ; and, like a grim lion foiled of his prey, he suddenly retired from that blood-stained fortress, before whose walls the rising sun of his ambition had suffered its first eclipse.

Yet along this battle-field of nations, Peace has driven her ivory chariot. This Aceldama of centuries has been hallowed by the footsteps of her glorious Prince. Lying on the high road of travel between Galilee and Jerusalem, it was crossed and recrossed by Christ and his apostles during their sojourn on earth. It now smiles in beauty, as calm and serene as though no strife had ever vexed its bosom. The dews of Tabor and of Hermon fall as gently on it as they did four thousand years ago. The River Kishon still murmurs a perpetual requiem for the dead slumberers on its banks. Yet all unconscious they sleep, waiting the solemn peal of that mighty trumpet whose thunder-tones shall awaken a universe.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PLAIN OF DAMASCUS.

PERHAPS there is no event recorded in the Bible that has occasioned more controversy than the site of the transfiguration. By some the scene is laid on Mount Tabor; while others locate it on Mount Hermon. After carefully examining the arguments of different writers, I am strongly inclined to favour the latter hypothesis. Mount Hermon is indeed a "*high mountain apart*" in the most literal sense. It rises like a lofty spire from the most eastern ridge of Lebanon, or Anti-Libanus, ten thousand feet in air. Its snowy head caught the first sunlight in the land of Judah, and on its brow the sinking day-god shed his parting smile. In sublimity and awful majesty it has no compeer in the Holy Land; and it is only inferior in height to

the great Ararat, on whose brow the ark rested when the assuaged waters again revealed the upper regions of a deluged world.

From the eastern base of Mount Hermon, or ridge of Anti-Libanus, stretches out a high, sandy plain, running off to the eastward, until at last it sinks into the Desert of Arabia. In the midst of this plain stands the venerable city of Damascus, embosomed in a sea of verdure, foliage, and flowers. Like an oasis of the desert, or an island of the blest in the shadowy world of waters, it smiles in everlasting green. It is said of Mahomet, that when he beheld it he exclaimed, "Man can have but one paradise; I will not enter this below, lest I should have none above."

It was no vain boast of Naaman that Abana and Pharphar were better than all the waters of Israel. The former springs from the side of Anti-Libanus, and rushes down a thousand feet to the plains below. It is the outlet of a small lake on Mount Hermon, and goes rushing and tearing on until it reaches the oasis of Damascus, around which it curves like a diamond necklace. Pharphar rises from the foot of Mount Libanus and flows past the southern portion of the

city, after which it wanders away like the Abana toward the desert, in whose bosom both are finally engulfed.

Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, having presented himself before the king of Israel, with a letter from his royal master charging him to heal the bearer of his leprosy, the king of Israel was alarmed, and rent his clothes. "Am I God," said he, "to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send to me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me." To the eye of reason nothing seemed clearer. Here was a neighbouring king, between whose bands and those of Israel there had been perpetual strife, who had now sent the chief captain of his host, a valiant and honourable man, but one withal afflicted with an incurable and loathsome disease, to be cured, and that at the hands of his hereditary enemy. What could it seem to the king of Israel but a pretext for breaking the present truce, and recommencing the war?

No sooner did Elisha the prophet learn these things than he sent unto the king of Israel, say-

ing, "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." It was, in truth, on his account that Naaman had been induced to undertake the journey; for a little maid, captured by the Syrians in the land of Israel, and given to Naaman's wife, had so often wished her master was with the prophet in Samaria, that at last her wishes had attracted attention, and Naaman had set out to seek the renowned prophet, whose healing powers had so impressed his captive's imagination.

Behold the chariot of the courtly Syrian drawn up with due solemnity before the door of Elisha's house. It is with him a great business transaction. He has brought ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment, to pay the healing prophet for the use of his miraculous skill, and he now expects an audience, and a cure worthy of the price.

Great was his disappointment when, instead of the prophet coming out to him in state, receiving his magnificent presents with gratitude, calling upon the name of the Lord his God, and *striking* his hand over the leprous parts and

healing them instantly, a messenger came with the simple injunction, "Go wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean."

The Syrian was wroth, and turned away with a proud feeling of patriotic disappointment. How utterly contemptible! To go and wash in one of the rivers of Israel, when both Abana and Pharphar, his own beautiful streams, rolled their crystal waters along, better, infinitely better, than all the waters of Israel. If washing could purify him, why not wash in them and be clean? So he turned away and departed in a rage.

But on his servants representing to him that if the prophet had bid him do some great thing he would surely have done it, and how foolish it was in him to omit the simple remedy prescribed, he was at last induced to visit the despised river, and wash in its healing waters.

Whether Naaman became gradually clean with each successive ablution, or whether the miracle was reserved for the last immersion, we can only conjecture. It was probably the latter. Naaman had bathed six times, and no change had taken place. But now the mighty angel that, six

centuries after, went down and troubled the pool of Bethesda, descended and troubled the flowing Jordan. As Naaman stepped in, almost despairing, lo, the foul ulcers were healed—the withered flesh expanded—the snow-white skin peeled off, and like an infant's flesh in purity and softness came that new garment of mortality upon that living skeleton. With joyful alacrity he returned to the prophet, exclaiming, "Behold now I know there is no God in all the earth but in Israel," and beseeching Elisha to take a blessing in return for the healing miracle.

But the prophet would receive no recompense. "It was no time to receive money and garments, and olive-yards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men-servants and women-servants," in exchange for God's miraculous gift; so he dismissed him with a blessing.

But Gehazi, his servant, thinking his master had spared the Syrian in not receiving some of his proffered gifts, pursued after Naaman, and besought him for a talent of silver and two changes of raiment, which the grateful Syrian generously doubled. These Gehazi took and hid in the house, and then appeared before the prophet as

bold and undaunted as though nothing had happened.

How adequate was the punishment inflicted on the lying servant! He had received the *price* of the disease from the departing Syrian: it was but just he should take the disease at its estimated value. Never was justice more fully meted out than when Gehazi left the presence of Elisha, "with the leprosy of Naaman cleaving unto him, as white as snow."

Between the Israelites and Syrians there seems to have existed a sort of continual border warfare. Bands of Syrians made inroads upon Judea from time to time, destroying the cities, driving off the cattle, and putting the captive inhabitants to ransom. It was in one of those excursions that the Syrians had captured the little maid who made known to Naaman the wonderful power of the prophet Elisha. Like the raids of the Gaelic highlanders on the lowland Saxons, these Syrian mountaineers seem to have incessantly harassed their Jewish neighbours with every species of predatory warfare.

The king of Syria had despatched a company of these *marauders* to make an inroad in the Jewish

border. The expedition had been secretly planned, and seemed to promise success; but, to the surprise of the king, it returned without effecting any thing. The Israelites seemed fully prepared for its reception; their cattle were secured; the scattered villagers gathered into a fenced city; and a band of Jews, more numerous and better armed, ready to oppose them. It was plain that the whole scheme was by some means known to the Israelites.

Again and again did the Syrian monarch send his invading bands into the Jewish coasts. They returned with the same ill-success. No matter how formidable the company—the Israelites had an overwhelming force ready to crush it; no matter how secretly it was despatched—the Jews were watching for it, and every thing was secured. The heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled. It was plain to him that there was treachery among his servants; so, calling them around him, he inquired, “Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?”

He paused, and one of them answered, “None, my lord, O king; but Elisha the prophet, that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words

thou speakest in thy bedchamber." Here was a solution of the mystery entirely unexpected. The king at once determined to capture the revealing prophet; and, finding he was at a place called Dothan, sent a great host, with chariots and horsemen, by night, to encompass the city.

As the morning light slowly broke over the mountain-tops, the servant of Elisha, who had risen early and gone forth, beheld a mighty host encircling the city. Hurrying back affrighted to his master, he cried, "Alas, master, how shall we do?" But Elisha was undismayed. He had seen the gathering bands approaching the city through the darkness of the night, and knew the purpose for which they came. As he prayed the Lord to open the eyes of the young man, that he might see his hitherto invisible defenders, lo! the scales fell from his servant's eyes, and the mountains round about were full of horses and chariots of fire descending down to the very feet of Elisha.

It does not appear that these aerial denizens were specially created for the occasion. Unseen by the gross eyes of mortality, those fiery chariots had wheeled round the prophet since his predecessor went up in one of them to heaven. At

times the curtain was lifted, and the enlightened eye permitted to gaze for a moment upon them. When the Syrian host fled away affrighted from the siege of Samaria, who but they thundered in their ears? And ere Jerusalem was encompassed by the Roman armies in that last fatal siege, they were seen athwart the evening sky, jostling against each other as if in combat. Who but they opened the great gate of the temple, and murmured, "Let us depart hence," so loud that the human ear drunk in the sound? Have they indeed departed from earth for ever, or do they still wheel in bright circles round the mountains and cities of Judea, a fragment of that spiritual host

—"walking the earth unseen,

In countless myriads through the passing hours?"

Elisha not only prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of his servant, but that he would also smite the besieging Syrians with blindness; which request being granted, he went boldly forth and told them to follow him, and he would lead them to the man they were seeking. As they followed him, the Lord, at his intercession, opened their eyes again, and, behold, they were in the

midst of Samaria. We can picture their consternation, led as prisoners of war by one man to the very centre of their enemies' city.

On the closing scene, and its *moral* consequences, we can never dwell too much. The king of Israel, when he saw them, appealed to the prophet to know whether he should smite them or not. One word from Elisha would have turned the coming feast into a banquet of blood. But, on the contrary, the prophet gave orders to set provisions before them, so that they might "eat, and drink, and return unto their master."

Perhaps in the whole annals of warfare there never occurred so simple yet efficacious a remedy as the one prescribed by Elisha. For a long period the Israelites had been grievously afflicted by the bands from Syria. They had now surrounded and imprisoned a great host. As they spread the feast before them, strange emotions must have stirred their minds—a proud feeling of noble superiority, like that of the lordly lion disdaining to slay the prostrate hart. And the Syrians—what a change!—all taken captive by the very man they had come to seize. As they sat down to the feast prepared by his direction, a

warm throb of gratitude must have swelled toward him who had thus turned their late foemen into ministering friends, and hung the festive wreath on the stern and rugged brow of war.

This was the last predatory excursion. "THE BANDS OF SYRIA CAME NO MORE INTO THE LAND OF ISRAEL." They were completely vanquished. Alas! when will Christians follow the directions of the prophet, and learn that kindness is the most potent weapon to break asunder, mollify, and regenerate the human heart?

The Plain of Damascus will be ever sacred to the Christian heart, as the chosen place where Paul the great apostle of the Gentiles was first called into the work of the Christian ministry. This extraordinary individual, whose life has had more influence upon the destinies of the world than any man that ever lived, was a young man, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and in consequence a Pharisee of the straitest sect. He had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, the most renowned instructor and expounder of the Jewish religion; and Saul, as an enthusiastic zealot, and jealous of the traditions of his fathers, was exceeding mad and enraged against the new sect called

Christians. With alacrity he entered upon their persecution—making sad havoc of the church—hailing them to prison—making them blaspheme, and delivering them to death; and when Stephen, the first martyr, was stoned, the witnesses laid down their garments at his feet.

But the sect still increased. Not in Jerusalem alone did the word grow and multiply; the heresy was spreading to all the cities and villages. Even in Damascus there were disciples rising up to call upon the name of the crucified Saviour. Breathing out threatenings and slaughter against them, Saul goes to the chief priests and obtains a commission arming him with authority to bring away any of the new sect he could find, bound, to Jerusalem for punishment.

It was midday when Saul approached Damascus. He had just crossed the bridge over the River Pharphar, without the walls of the city, when suddenly, like falling lightning, a bright light shone around him. It was so intensely dazzling that it blinded his eyes, and smote him to earth as though crushed by a thunderbolt. As he lay trembling and astonished upon the ground, there came a voice from the enfolding radiance so

intensely piercing that it thrilled upon his ear like an electric shock. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" "Who art thou, Lord?" he faintly inquired. "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest," answered the voice, and added, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Most truly had it been hard for the enthusiastic persecutor to kick against the "*pricks*." As he marked the meekness and humility of his numerous victims, particularly Stephen, who knelt down and prayed for his persecutors in the agonies of death, his conscience must have pricked him, especially when the garments of the witnesses were laid at his feet, thereby implying that henceforth Stephen's blood was upon his skirts. Human nature can never be wholly hardened. Touches of compassion must now and then have passed over his heart, like gleams of sunshine through a wintry storm. But his mad and insane devotion to the traditions of his fathers, like a curbless steed hurrying its rider onward to destruction, bore him forward regardless of all consequences.

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" inquired Saul. To which the voice replied, "Arise,

and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." He rose from the earth and opened his eyes, but the vision had passed away. The men who had accompanied him stood speechless with astonishment, hearing a voice but seeing no man. The river Pharpar murmured by, flashing like a burnished shield, and the midday sun shed down its golden light. But Saul saw them not. Darkness followed that intense radiance, and now, blind and helpless, his companions led him by the hand into Damascus.

What a wonderful change! The persecuting zealot enters the city, humbled, subdued, and penitent. He was led direct to the house of one Judas, in the street called Straight. So great was the conflict, and so deep and piercing his remorse, that for three days he neither ate nor drank. But at last he prayed, calling upon Him whom he had not only despised, but often blasphemed.

A vision was at last vouchsafed unto him, of one of the persecuted sect coming and restoring him to sight; and soon the vision was fulfilled; for Ananias, a disciple in Damascus, had seen a

corresponding vision, directing him to go unto Saul, and put his hands upon him, and restore him to sight.

The conversion of Saul from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, is one continuous miracle. He was indeed a chosen vessel unto God, to bear the name of Christ before the Gentiles, and to demonstrate to the unbelieving Jews that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. He was the first man of education and standing called to the work of the Christian ministry, and, like a polished shaft in the rising church, towered above his brethren. The last witness to the Christian resurrection, he nevertheless exceeded all his predecessors in eloquently demonstrating the ascension of his buried Lord—that he had indeed “arisen from the dead, led captivity captive, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.”

It was no vain boast of Paul, that, though the least of the apostles, he nevertheless had laboured more abundantly than they all. Through Judea, Asia, Greece, and the isles of the Mediterranean, and finally to Rome itself, he travelled, *preaching* every where the glad tidings of the gos-

pel of Christ. By his ministry multitudes were gathered to the church; and when, at last, condemned to death and beheaded at Rome by the tyrant Nero, he could indeed truly exclaim, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

The city of Damascus still exists, glorious to behold. Even the street called *Straight* remains unaltered. Occupying an intermediate station between the east and the west, caravans innumerable have for four thousand years unladen at her gates, and army after army has encamped without on the plains, or swept in the fury of battle over her, pursuing or pursued. Yet there she stands, flourishing in unchecked vigour, a charnel lamp burning unwasted in the tomb of ages; or like an ancient pillar, lone and lofty, amid the ruins of the mighty past, around whose base dead empires lie scattered.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PLAINS OF GALILEE.

THE Plains of Galilee lie on both sides of the Sea of Tiberias, and extend as far up on each side of the River Jordan as the waters of Merom. They are fertile, luxuriant, and beautiful; but generally of small extent. Embosomed in what is called the hill country of Upper Galilee, lying between the foot of Mount Lebanon and the great Plain of Esdraelon, they present a succession of rich landscapes, unrivalled in beauty, and unsurpassed in any part of the known world. Some of them run down to the very edge of the Sea of Tiberias, and, stretching over to the eastern side, indent the hills of Bashan, as though the waters of Galilee had been poured into the lap of Spring, dividing it through the midst.

The tourist who would describe Galilee so as to

present a living picture to the mind of his readers, would be at a loss where to commence. With Esdraelon as a base, it is one broad plain, filled with innumerable hills. Taking Lebanon as a standard, it is one vast hill, intersected in every part by winding valleys. Perhaps the best idea we obtain is to suppose the Plain of Esdraelon stretching to the foot of Lebanon, and the Hills of Galilee huge fragments split from its mighty sides, and tumbled down in promiscuous heaps on the surrounding plain.

Difficult, however, as it may be to describe the face of Galilee, its climate and productions are beyond all praise. The cool air, falling from the snowy summit of Mount Lebanon—that great condenser and refrigerator of the land of Israel—equalizes the temperature, and makes the climate almost one perpetual spring. The effect of this wind is beautifully described by Solomon in his incomparable Song: “Awake, O North Wind! and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.”

The Plains of Galilee are well watered. Besides the two principal fountains whose united waters form the River Jordan, innumerable

streamlets flow from the base of Lebanon. Solomon, in describing the church, compares it to "a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon."

Nature seems here to have striven to group all her productions together—to bind the torrid, temperate, and frigid zones into one wreath. Walnuts, which require the greatest cold, grow beside palm-trees, that require the greatest heat. Grapes, figs, olives, and pomegranates, productions of a milder atmosphere, flourish beside them. Melons and citrons creep along the ground, and magnificent fields of wheat, maize, barley, and oats wave along the hills. In the valleys, on the plains, and up the hillsides, spreads a carpet of the greenest grass, enamelled with millions of tulips, hyacinths, anemones, lilies, and violets. Such is Galilee, the Saviour's home; such the green and smiling landscapes over which he wandered during the first thirty years of his life; and here he "taught, as man never taught," those sublime and holy precepts which make the heart "wise unto salvation."

The village of Nazareth lies directly north from Jerusalem, embosomed in the hills of lower

Galilee. Fifteen of those mountain-hills meet together, and surround the plain of Nazareth like giant Anakims kneeling round the shrine of grace. Between them, narrow valleys run off in every direction, winding among the surrounding hills. The town itself is built at the foot of the western hill or mountain ridge, which rises nearly five hundred feet above it.

The view from the summit of this hill is enchanting. Westward, the Mediterranean Sea, like a blue mantle, spreads along the horizon, Mount Carmel closing the view in the south-west. To the east, the Sea of Galilee, like a mirror of molten silver, smiles in the glad sunlight, its clear, crystal depths reflecting the dim outline of the Hills of Bashan, with their crest of evergreen oaks. On the north, Mount Hermon rears his snowy head, lord of the Sacred Mountain world. There Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, put on the attributes of divinity, and shone with a radiance all his own, yet brighter, infinitely brighter, than the sun at noonday. At our feet is Nazareth, the Saviour's early home. Yon fountain sending up its sparkling waters, and stealing away unobserved like the hand of true charity, is

the Fountain of the Virgin, so called in honour of Mary, the mother of Jesus. How often has she drank of its cooling waters, and held the brimming cup to the lips of the infant Immanuel! How often have the steps of the Saviour wandered over these hill-tops, and his gaze fallen upon the scene before us—perchance at twilight's silent, solemn hour, looking down upon the great plain below, where the din of battle has so often rolled, and the garments of the warrior been dyed in blood, and thinking of his own princely mission of Peace! How often has he looked out upon the western sea, and watched the white sails go skimming down, fading away in the far distance like a bird in air, and thought of the great ships that in coming years would plough every ocean and furrow every sea with the glad tidings of his blessed word! And O, how often have his compassionate tears fallen on the green grass at our feet, at the dark and sinful condition of a ruined world: a world without him utterly undone! The heart that can think of Nazareth, its inhabitants, and sacred associations, without emotion, is indeed calloused, and should never wander, *even in imagination*, over its sacred domains.

There is a marriage at Cana of Galilee. Jesus and his disciples have been invited, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, is there. The mystic ceremony has been performed, and two loving hearts made one flesh. In the joyous exhilaration of the occasion, the attendant guests demand wine to pledge the future prosperity of the united twain. But the vintage has not yet commenced. On the hills of Galilee the growing grapes hang in green, unripe clusters, and there is no wine left of last year's vintage to quench the thirst of the wedding guests. As they murmur to each other, the murmurs reach the ears of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who informs her son of the omission. "They have," says she, "no wine."

Then it was that the blessed Saviour commanded the six stone pots, standing in the room adjoining the one in which the feasters were assembled, to be filled. These pots were used to hold the water in which the guests washed their hands between each course. As the servants filled them up to the brim,

"The conscious water saw its God and blushed,"

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as it reflected back the Saviour's calm and benignant looks. It was wine—pure and refreshing as the gushing waters of the sacred fountain from whose depths it had been drawn. Most truly might the governor of the feast compliment the bridegroom in keeping the good wine till the last. There was no maddening stimulant or poisonous drug in its composition. No drunkenness followed its use, or quarrelling, oaths, and blasphemy, like that which follows the wake of man-made wine. On the contrary, "like the best wine for his beloved," described by Solomon, "it went down sweetly, causing the lips of those that were asleep to speak."

On the western side of the Sea of Tiberias, near its centre, the hills recede from the shore, and enclose the small, fertile Plain of Magdala, the most charming of all the Plains of Galilee. It is celebrated as the birthplace of Mary Magdalene, out of whom Christ cast seven devils. Her residence was at the southern extremity, near the Plain of Genesareth, another of the Plains of Galilee, and a favourite retreat of the blessed Saviour.

There is something inexpressibly touching

and mournful in contemplating the ruins of a human mind. "The great central pillar, Reason, has been shaken down, and round it, in broken masses, lie the scattered fragments of thought"—not dark and silent as the ruins of an outward temple, over which the ivy silently creeps, wrapping them in nature's funeral shroud, but like the fragments of a polished mirror, every piece flashing with its own peculiar ray—so bright, yet oh, so wild and cold! I have seen ruin in a thousand shapes, from the proud baronial castle* of a King-Maker, down to a broken tombstone covered with lichen; yet never have I beheld so mournful a sight as the shattered ruins of a human mind.

Mary Magdalene was a demoniac. In the ruined temple of her mind seven devils had taken up their residence, and, like the dragons and satyrs in the deserted palaces of Babylon, they danced and cried there. Yet no sooner did the Prince of Peace rebuke them but they fled away. The shattered temple was rebuilt, and the poor lunatic restored to reason. The fountain of her

* Kenilworth.

gratitude was unsealed. Through all his ministrations she followed him with the purest devotion, and when he was condemned and led away to be crucified on Mount Calvary, weeping, she followed her deliverer to the fatal cross. While it was yet dark, on the first day of the week, she came alone unto the sepulchre. There Jesus revealed himself to her sorrowing sight, and commissioned her to preach the glad tidings of the Christian resurrection : that "those who sleep in death shall awake,"—"corruption shall put on incorruption, and mortality put on immortality." The Sea of Galilee seems to have been a special favourite of the blessed Saviour. Between its pure, limpid waters, and his own ministry, there appears a close affinity. From the ranks of its humble fishermen his disciples were chosen. Along its grassy shores how often has he wandered, drinking of its crystal waters, and lying down at night to sleep on its banks, listening to the low murmur of the dying waves tapping against the pebbly shore! How green and how beautiful the grassy carpet covering the lap of those lovely plains along its shores! How sweet the perfume of wild-flowers dotting its bosom—a thousand times

greener, a thousand times sweeter, when pressed by the passing foot of the Son of Man!

Jesus had passed over the Sea of Galilee to the eastern side, the country of the Gadarenes. There he wrought many mighty miracles. The blind were restored to sight, the deaf ears unstopped, devils cast out, lepers made whole, and those afflicted with disease, healed. Like a descending avalanche the people had increased, until five thousand had congregated together. As the disciples saw the immense multitude pressing after them, they besought him to send the people away to the distant villages to buy provisions; but he instructed them to set provisions before the multitude that they might eat. But the disciples informed him that all the provisions they had at command were only five barley loaves and two small fishes belonging to a lad; "but what," said Andrew and Simon, "are they among so many? behold, two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little."

In companies of fifty they are seated on the grass; after giving thanks, the blessed Saviour took the bread, brake it, and gave to his disciples,

who distributed it to the famished multitude. Like his own self-increasing word, it multiplied and grew as it passed from hand to hand. The fishes also increased. That mighty multitude partook of both, and were filled. Of the remnants left, twelve baskets full were gathered up, a memento of a feast unequalled since the foundation of the world.

The glorious sun has sunk beyond the western wave, and night, most quiet night, wrapped her mantle round her ebon couch, and laid down to dream. The dispersed multitude have sought their distant homes, and now, in the slumbers of night, feast again on the miraculous loaves and fishes, or, dreamless, lie in deep oblivion. The disciples have entered into a little ship to return to Capernaum; but He, the Master, has remained behind. Alone he has sought a mountain-top, to pour out his soul once more in the bosom of the Father, or muse, perchance, on the coming scenes of Hermon, Olivet, and Calvary. How sweet and soft the night-wind sighs among the long grass, and lifts the curls on the Saviour's brow! The listening stars are forth in all their beauty, and seem to whisper in answering sym-




phony. But hark! A sudden storm is on the sea beneath. Sweeping up from El Ghor, a midnight shower is on the air. The lightnings gleam athwart the rolling clouds, and traverse their angry masses; while thunders echo and re-echo from shore to shore. The winds are unloosed, and lash the waters into sudden waves, that dash, like maddened spirits, along the distant shores. The disciples, in their frail vessel, are caught in the sudden tempest, and now labour with shortened sail and straining oar to bring her head to the wind. As the waves dash over them, and the sea foams more and more tempestuously, they give way to fear. Those humble fishermen have never seen an ocean storm, or been exposed to so furious a tempest on their own quiet sea. As their eyes strain to pierce the sudden darkness, in hopes of seeing some signs of land, lo, a spirit is approaching them. It glides over the dashing waves like a sea-bird sweeping past on dusky wing, and as they cry out with fear, a familiar voice thrills upon their ears, "*It is I, be not afraid.*" It was indeed the blessed Saviour, who, seeing the sudden storm that had overtaken them, came

in the watches of the night, walking on the water to their relief.

No sooner did Peter hear that well-known voice, than he besought permission to come forth and meet the Saviour. But, alas for his wavering faith ! as he moves over the waters his mind gives way to doubts, and he begins to sink. "Help, Lord, or I perish !" bursts from his trembling lips, and instinctively he turns to the dim form moving beside him for help. "O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt ?" falls in gentle rebuke from that compassionate form, as, stretching out a hand to Peter, he caught him ere he sank ; and no sooner do they come on board than the wind sinks, the waves go down, and there is indeed a great calm. The Plain of Genesareth is immediately at hand, and ere another day has passed away, the sick and diseased have gathered together, striving but to touch the hem of his garment, or feel his healing shadow passing over them ; for as many as do so are immediately made whole.

But a grander scene was soon destined to consecrate and hallow for ever the immortal Plains of Galilee. The Saviour had been crucified.

"It is finished!" had thrilled like an electric shock along the universe. Before it, earth shook like a reed in the tempest; the sun turned pale and hid his face in terror; the veil of the temple parted in twain like a rent garment; and, waking from their long sleep, the dead saints were rising in crowds, bursting their grave-clothes, and wandering in the eye of day. A mighty angel had descended with a countenance like lightning, and raiment white as snow, and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre. The "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" had shaken off the sleep of death, "led captivity captive," and was now about to ascend on high. He had revealed himself unto Mary as she wept at the door of the sepulchre; to Peter and John as they hastened thither; to the two disciples journeying to Emmaus, expounding to them the Scriptures, and showing that Christ must needs have suffered; to the eleven apostles assembled together on the first day of the week; and afterward, when Thomas was present, inviting him to draw near and put his fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into his side, and to be no longer *faithless, but believing.*



“ Behold, after I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee,” said Christ to his disciples as they sat eating the last passover, and the promise was reiterated by the angel sitting in the sepulchre : “Go tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.”

On the Sea of Tiberias a chosen company of disciples are fishing. There are Simon Peter, and Thomas, called Didymus, and Nathanael, of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples, one of whom was John the Beloved. They have toiled all night and caught nothing. As the morning dawns, a stranger appears on the shore and directs them to cast their nets on the right side of the ship ; and now, behold, they are not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. At once John, the Beloved, saith unto Simon Peter, “It is the Lord.” Peter, being naked, immediately wraps his fisher’s coat about him and leaps into the sea, and the rest come in the vessel at once to land.

There a repast is prepared. Bread and fish, cooked by angelic hands, are arranged for them. The Lord takes the bread, breaks

it as in the days of old, passes it to the disciples, and partakes thereof himself. As they stand thus eating together, the question is propounded to Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" On receiving an affirmative answer, the charge is given, "Feed my lambs." Again the question is asked, and again an affirmative answer returned, when the charge is given, "Feed my sheep." A third time the question is propounded; when Peter, being grieved because he was questioned thrice upon one point, and that point the most dear and sacred of all subjects to his heart, even his love for the departed Lord, answered, "Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee." Again the sacred charge is given, "Feed my sheep," and the solemn command added, "Follow thou me."

The character of Peter is perhaps the most marked and peculiar of any one of the apostles. With one memorable exception, he seems to have been of an ardent and determined character, and a firm believer in the divine mission of his crucified Lord. But in a moment of human weakness, the warlike disciple, whose flashing sword cut off the ear of the high priest's servant,

was induced to deny his Lord and Master with oaths and imprecations. Yet one look from the thrice-denied Saviour brought him back at once to his first love, and he went out from his presence with a bursting heart, and, in the impressive language of the Bible, "wept bitterly."

But the set time had at last come when the crucified Saviour was to meet his disciples in Galilee for the last earthly interview. It was indeed a great and solemn occasion; and what mortal pen can describe its glory and unutterable sublimity? Between the risen Lord and the disciples there assembled, hung the mystery of mysteries—the drapery of the tomb. To the awful obscurity of a spiritual being was added the majesty of a risen God. The scene was one of the mountain-hills of Galilee. On the green plains below, the radiant sunbeams sleep in quiet beauty, and an atmosphere of dazzling brightness hangs around that mountain-brow. The Sea of Galilee heaves below, its soft, gentle murmurs falling on the ear like the dying strains of distant music. The disciples are all there—more than five hundred in number—gathered to take

a last farewell of one they have long loved and long revered. No longer is he clad in a seamless garment, travel-stained, and bedewed with the tears of compassion, but wrapped in a vesture of living light, a crown of stars upon his brow, and a countenance brighter than the sun shining in his midday splendour. Hovering round him are countless legions of mighty angels, with all the glittering retinue of heaven's hierarchy. Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, and Powers, with Archangels and lordly Seraphims, all bright and dazzling as beams of intensified light. Wheeling round in flashing circles are the "chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof," with Moses, and Elias, and a host of patriarchs, prophets, and spirits of just men made perfect, gathered round their ascending King.

The particulars of this last solemn interview are unrevealed. Words cannot describe it, or the imagination of man conceive it. How the disciples must have trembled before the unfolded pageantry of heaven. And when the solemn words, "Go ye into all nations, and preach the Gospel, baptizing them in the name of the *Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* :



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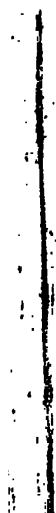
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